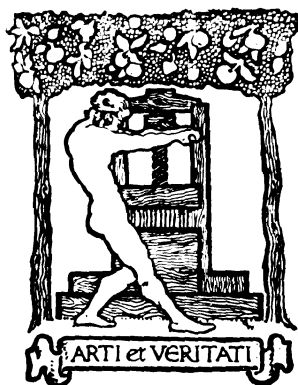


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Poetry and Dreams

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Poetry and Dreams

POETRY is proverbially difficult to define and explain. The reason for this difficulty seems to lie partly in the subject itself and partly in our attitude toward it. The subject is indeed deep and complex. The production of poetry is still, as it has always been, a mysterious process, even to the poets themselves; while even the most devoted and enlightened readers of poetry still find mystery in its action and effect. Poetry, as Shelley believed, "acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness."¹ Many poets — for example Shelley and Wordsworth — in defining poetry resort to poetical figures; others, like our poet of democracy, avoid definition scrupulously. "Let me not dare," says Walt Whitman, "to attempt a definition of poetry, nor answer the question what it is. Like religion, love, nature, while these terms are indispensable, and we all give sufficiently accurate meaning to them, in my opinion no definition that has ever been made sufficiently encloses the name poetry."² Perhaps, however, mystery in the subject engenders superstition, and leads us to regard poetry with supine reverence and wonder. We should indeed worship our great poets, as the men of old did their bards and prophets, but not abjectly, as savages do their medicine men. We speak of the "divine" Shakespeare, perhaps knowing too little of this poet's life to recognize how much he shared our common humanity. We call poetry divine, which is another way of saying that it is still inexplicable to us. All things are of God; and in the subject of poetry, as in others, our increasing knowledge should lead us to clearer understanding. We need make no apology, then, for attempting to approach this mystery.

There is some resemblance and unexplained relation between poetry and dreams. The poet and the dreamer are somehow alike in their faculty of vision. This relation is

¹ *Defense of Poetry*, ed. Cook, p. 11.

² *A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads*.

indicated by the uses of language, which, spontaneously expressing the sense of mankind, often reveal psychological truth not otherwise readily discovered. The poets have traditionally been dreamers, from the "dreamer Merlin" to the latest youth who "dreams" and rhymes. The poet writes of "dreams which wave before the half-shut eye."¹ The word *dream* is thus constantly used by critics in describing the poet's work. "The true poet," says Charles Lamb, "dreams being awake."² Poetry is defined by Sully Prudhomme as "le rêve par lequel l'homme aspire à une vie supérieure."³ The poets themselves in different times and different countries testify to the same effect, seeing not merely a metaphorical resemblance but an essential relation between dreams and poetry. Hans Sachs, an inspired poet, thus speaks of the poet's inspiration:⁴

"Mein Freund, das g'rad ist Dichter's Werk
Dass er sein Träumen deut' und merk',
Glaub mir, des Menschen wahrstes Wahn
Wird ihm im Traume aufgetan:
All' Dichtkunst und Poeterei
Ist nichts als Wahrtraum-Deuterei."

"The happy moment for the poet," says Bettinelli, "may be called a dream—dreamed in the presence of the intellect, which stands by and gazes with open eyes at the performance."⁵ "Genius," according to Jean Paul Richter, "is, in more senses than one, a sleepwalker, and in its bright dream can accomplish what one awake could never do. It mounts every height of reality in the dark; but bring it out of its world of dreams and it stumbles."⁵ Goethe, using the same word, speaks of writing Werther "unconsciously, like a sleepwalker," and of his songs he says: "It had happened to me so often that I would repeat a song to myself and then be unable to recollect it, that sometimes I would run to my desk and, without stirring from my place, write out the poem from beginning to end, in a sloping

¹ Thomson, *Castle of Indolence*, i, 6.

² *Essays of Elia*, "The Sanity of True Genius."

³ For development of this admirable definition see *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Oct. 1, 1897, "Qu'est que la Poesie?"

⁴ *Die Meistersinger*. Quoted by W. Stekel, *Dichtung und Neurose*, p. 2.

⁵ W. Hirsch, *Genius and Degeneration*, p. 32.

hand. For the same reason I always preferred to write with a pencil, on account of its marking so readily. On several occasions indeed the scratching and spluttering of my pen awoke me from my somnambulistic poetizing."¹ Hebbel, after recording in his Journal, having actually dreamed an exceedingly beautiful but terrible dream, says: "My belief that dream and poetry are identical, is more and more confirmed."² Lamb, who was in spirit even more than in accomplishment a poet, believed that "the degree of the soul's creativeness in sleep might furnish no whimsical criterion of the quantum of poetical faculty resident in the same soul waking."³ Such expressions suggest that dreaming and poetizing, if not identical as Hebbel believed, are more than superficially related. If we wish to understand poetry, a clue like this, given us by the poets themselves, is worth following.

Unfortunately, however, dreams are as little known to us in their true nature as poetry itself. Though they are as old as history — probably as old as mankind — they are still obscure in their cause and significance and their relation to the ordinary mental processes. The people, in all countries and from the earliest times, have clung to the belief that they are significant, particularly as foretelling the future. Their interpretation, however, has always been vague and uncertain. The theories of modern psychologists do not ordinarily go far or deep enough to be convincing or even interesting. Altogether the world of dreams has remained a mystery to us — a world in which we live a fantastic secondary mental life curiously unrelated to that of waking, from which we return puzzled by our fleeting memories.

A recent book of Professor Sigmund Freud promises to

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

² Quoted by Stekel, p. 2.

³ *Essays*, "Witches and Other Night Fears." In Lamb's original manuscript (in the Dyce-Forster Collection at South Kensington) the final paragraph of the essay reads as follows: "When I awoke I came to a determination to write prose all the rest of my life; and with submission to some of our young writers, who are yet diffident of their powers, and balancing between verse and prose, they might not do unwisely to decide the preference by the texture of their natural dreams. If these are prosaic, they may depend upon it they have not much to expect in a creative way from their artificial ones. What dreams must not Spenser have had!"

give us a better understanding of this subject of dreams.¹ According to Dr. Freud our dreams are an integral part of our mental life, with definite origin and cause; they can be definitely interpreted and brought into relation with our waking thoughts and feelings; they are in certain respects similar to other mental activities with which we are familiar; and they have a definite biological function which is important to our mental and physical well-being. This view of dreams forms part of an extensive and original psychological theory, developed by Dr. Freud, which is perhaps too new to be generally accepted — which, however, undoubtedly suggests new views, not merely in the direction in which it was first mainly intended to be applied, but in many others — notably in literature. When I had occasion recently to become acquainted with this theory of dreams I was at once struck by the fact that many portions of it were equally applicable to poetry, so much so, indeed, that it occurred to me that Dr. Freud might have first developed his theory from poetry and then transferred ¹t to dreams. I have since learned that this was not the case, that in fact he first approached the subject from a very different direction. The relation to poetry, however, is striking.

I wish, then, in the first place to apply some portions of this theory to literary problems, in particular to transfer some of the conclusions in regard to dreams to the apparently related field of poetry, and to examine the evidence bearing on these conclusions which is supplied by literature. For the latter purpose I shall have to proceed mainly by quotation, even at the risk of trying the reader's patience. In fact, I do not wish to advance a new theory of poetry, or, for the most part, to express my own opinions; but rather to bring together and into relation some truths which have long since been expressed in poetry but have never been succinctly stated in prose.

Writing merely as a student of literature I shall have to assume the soundness of Dr. Freud's theory, though this may be still in debate among psychologists. Incidentally,

¹Die Traumdeutung, second edition, 1909. For summaries of Dr. Freud's theory of dreams, see American Journal of Psychology, Vol. XXI, pp. 283, 309.

however, I may be able to find some evidence bearing upon it in literature. New theories of this kind, if at all important, are seldom new in the sense that they have not been surmised and foreshadowed by poets and other imaginative writers. This is a part of the function of poets as prophets—to see truth imaginatively before it is grasped intellectually. It is one of the tests of new doctrines to ask if they thus find confirmation in literature.

Let us return to the parallel between poetry and dreams. Let us take into consideration also, for further comparison, besides dreams and poetry, two other mental activities which seem on similar evidence to be related—waking dreams or “day dreams,” and hysterical or neurotic hallucinations and illusions. That nocturnal dreams and day dreams have some relation is suggested by their common designation, while day dreams frequently pass into hallucinations. The word *dream* is supposed to be etymologically connected with the German *trügen*, to deceive, its fundamental idea being *illusion*. There is also apparent resemblance between the illusions of hysteria and the visions of poetic or prophetic rapture. The question is, What may these several kinds of mental activity have in common?

I

In a dream the scenes which we remember, with their grotesque figures and actions, and their curious emotional coloring, are called by Dr. Freud its “manifest content.” The manifest content is usually strange to us and cannot be intelligibly connected with our waking experience. Behind these appearances, however, is the “latent content”—the underlying thought of the dream—the impulses and ideas contributing to form it, of which underlying thought the remembered dream is a distorted, fictitious, or, one might almost say, dramatic representation. The dream is a group or series of significant symbols. Its interpretation is like that of a dumb-show or a charade, it is a matter of finding the meaning which lurks behind, actuates, and explains these strange appearances. And this meaning when found—the underlying thought—is no longer unintelligible; it fits

clearly into the dreamer's mental life, indeed it regularly concerns what to him is most personal and vital. These two things, the manifest and the latent contents, it is important that the reader should keep distinct and clearly in mind. The interpretation of dreams, of their manifest content, is a difficult matter, involving a knowledge of the so-called "dream-work,"—that is, of the strange processes by which the underlying thought is elaborated into the manifest content by the mind during sleep.

The relation thus indicated between the apparent and the underlying thought of dreams will perhaps seem less novel to those accustomed to analyze and interpret works of literature and the other arts. Behind every work of creative imagination—poem, painting, or piece of architecture—is the latent idea or motive impulse which inspires and explains it. The Prisoner of Chillon, for example, was the work of a man who passionately desired personal liberty and so devoted himself to the liberty of mankind. The Gothic cathedrals were inspired by the religious devotion and aspiration which dominated the middle ages. They were built, says Emerson, "when the builder and the priest and the people were overpowered by their faith. Love and fear laid every stone." Behind Marmion and Ivanhoe lay a love, contracted in childhood, for the medieval past,—which Scott spent his life in trying to realize and reconstruct. Scott's poems and novels were inventions—so to speak, dreams—having their key in Scott's ruling impulse, which expressed itself thus through the working of his imagination. In some similar way our ruling impulses are clothed in fictional forms by a play of the imagination in sleep.

Every dream, according to Dr. Freud—and this is one of the most important conclusions of the dream theory—has the same latent purport—to represent the imaginary fulfilment of some ungratified wish.¹ The underlying thought may always be expressed by a sentence beginning *Would that*—. In the dream proper this optative is dropped for the present indicative, or rather for a scene in which the wish is visibly represented as fulfilled. In dreams of children the wish is embodied openly; in those of adults it is commonly disguised

¹ Die Traumdeutung, III, VII (c).

and distorted in the representation. Thus, in the world of dreams, we obtain those things which are denied in the world of reality. We get money, place, children, friends, success in love, riddance of our enemies,—according to our desires. This fact is recognized by language in which *dream* is used for *wish*; to realize one's wildest dream is to obtain one's fondest wish. It is often recognized also in literature. "It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth," says Isaiah, "and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite."¹

Our dreams do not always fulfil our wishes in the obvious way suggested by this passage. Sometimes these wishes are hidden even from ourselves. We do not recognize them as our true wishes; much less do we recognize that they receive a fanciful fulfilment in our dreams. But at bottom every dream is inspired by and gratifies some desire of the soul.

Dr. Freud's theory of wish-fulfilment in dreams was probably not suggested to him by Nietzsche. It is, however, in remarkable agreement with the theory advanced in the *Morgenröthe*.² Nietzsche makes the supposition "that our dreams, to a certain extent, are able and intended to compensate for the accidental non-appearance of sustenance," or satisfaction for our cravings, "during the day" "Why was yesterday's dream full of tenderness and tears,

¹ Chap. XXIX, v. 8. So in *Romeo and Juliet*, each dreamer dreams according to his waking desire:

"And in this state she [Queen Mab] gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains and then they dream on love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight,
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees,
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream.

Sometimes she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a parson's nose as a' lies asleep,
Then dreams he of another benefice." (Act I, Sc. 4.)

² See the translation, *The Dawn of Day*, 1903, p. 118. The whole section, "Experience and Fiction," is most interesting.

while that of the preceding day was facetious and wanton, and of a previous one adventurous and engaged in a continued gloomy search? Why do I, on one, enjoy indescribable raptures of music; on another, soar and fly up with the fierce delight of an eagle to most distant summits? These *fictions*, which give scope and utterance to our cravings for tenderness or merriment, or adventurousness, or to our longing after music or mountains,—and everybody will have striking instances at hand—are interpretations of our nervous irritations during sleep. The fact that this text [of our nervous irritations] which, on the whole, remains very much the same for one night as for another, is so differently commented upon, that reason in its *poetic* efforts, on two successive days, imagines such different causes for the same nervous irritations, may be explained by the prompter of this reason being to-day another than yesterday,—another craving requiring to be gratified, exemplified, practised, refreshed, and uttered,—this very one, indeed, being at its flood-tide, while yesterday another had its turn? Real life has not this freedom of utterance which dream-life has; it is less *poetic*, less licentious.” Our cravings thus, in sleep, prompt a fictional and poetic gratification or utterance; Nietzsche’s expression is very suggestive.

Sometimes our dreams come true. Our wishes are seldom preposterous—inconceivably attainable. “In the attempt to realize our dreams,” as Mr Havelock Ellis says, “lies a large part of our business in life.”¹ Where there is a will there is a way. In waking reality we work toward and sometimes succeed in getting that for which we have longed, and of which we have dreamed. Thus the old belief that dreams are prophetic is justified. For the belief is indeed old and widespread, prevailing among all nations, civilized and uncivilized, and leaving traces in all literatures.² “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh,” says the Lord to Joel, “and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” We may say of prophecy in dreams, as Dr. Johnson said of apparitions: “All argument is against it,

¹The World of Dreams, “Aviation in Dreams.”

²See E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, index.

but all belief is for it." We shall see presently that this belief is true in a profound sense.¹

It will be difficult, however, for various reasons, to give examples which will make what has just been said — of wish fulfilment and prophecy in dreams — clear and convincing to the reader. Actual dreams might easily be recounted, and to these might be added the wishes which they have been found on analysis really to represent. This, however, would be unsatisfactory unless the analysis were also given, which is impracticable. The interpretation of dreams is difficult, involving knowledge of a complicated technique. It does not proceed by a uniform, stereotyped substitution of meanings for the dream symbols as in the old quackery of the "dream books." Though the general principles of interpretation are definitely ascertained, their application in practice varies constantly with the experiences, thoughts, and associations of each individual. Thus any convincing interpretation of examples would take the reader deep into the personal history of the dreamer and would involve endless narrative and explanation.² It seems better for our purpose to take an example from the analogous field of waking dreams or "day dreams." When we are alone and our attention is abstracted, when we sit with wide-open eyes before the fire or gaze through the window without seeing, when the pressure of the outside world is thus relaxed, then we "dream being awake." Our imaginations are freed and portray to the mind's eye an ideal world in which our hopes, otherwise vain, are realized. Then we build castles in Spain, or elsewhere, as we wish. If the conditions are favorable, if the imagination is active, and if the mind is moved by strong emotion, these waking visions sometimes become extraordinarily vivid, amounting to hallucinations.

The following example, then, will illustrate wish-fulfil-

¹See Freud, *Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, zweite Folge, p. 57, on "resolution dreams"; also for dreams actually prophetic, A. A. Brill, *New York Medical Journal*, April 23, 1910. Dr. Brill first clearly explained the mantic character of dreams.

²Plenty of examples will be found in the *Traumdeutung* and in the summaries in the *American Journal of Psychology*, already referred to.

ment and prophecy in dreams. Goethe tells how, as he was once riding to Gesenheim after visiting Fredericka he saw his counterpart riding toward him. "I saw myself coming," he says, "along the same path on horseback toward me, dressed, as I had never been, in pike-gray and gold. I shook myself out of the dream, and the figure was gone. But it is singular that eight years later, not at all by choice, but only by chance, I found myself riding over the same path in the very direction my visionary self took, and clad in just these clothes, being again on my way to Fredericka. Whatever the explanation of these things may be, the wonderful phantom gave me at that moment of separation some alleviation."¹

It is noteworthy that Goethe himself speaks of this apparition as a dream. The illusion was apparently stronger than in the ordinary day dream, perhaps because Goethe's imagination was more profound, perhaps because the inciting emotion was more violent. The dream, however, is easy of interpretation. In this, as doubtless in all hallucinations, the wish is father to the thought. This visionary self, going in the opposite direction, obviously embodies a desire to return to Fredericka. And this desire is actually fulfilled, when eight years later Goethe follows the impulse which inspired his dream and returns to Fredericka, though apparently the impulse did not remain a conscious one with Goethe, for he returned by chance and not by choice. The dream thus becomes prophetic. Even the suit of pike-gray and gold is realized, though this also will seem not at all remarkable after a moment's consideration. Thus dreams always represent wishes, and thus dreams sometimes come true. In his pathetic essay, "Dream Children," Lamb recounts a dream in which one of the deepest wishes of his heart secures imaginary gratification; but on awaking he finds himself "quietly seated in his bachelor armchair," and his wish is never in actuality realized. The same wish inspires similar visions in a recent tale, "They," by Mr. Kipling.

Poets have often, if not always, been great dreamers, not only metaphorically, but actually, and both by night

¹Quoted by Hirsch, *Genius*, p. 93.

and by day Goethe had other strange visions. Lamb, for example in his "Chapter on Ears," recounts in his quaintly humorous way quite terrible dream experiences. Chatterton and Blake had remarkable dreams and visions, which were closely connected with their poetry. De Quincey found in dreams material for his "impassioned prose." Coleridge in sleep composed the beautiful fragment which he entitled "Kubla Khan." The "Ancient Mariner" is either a dream or like one; as Lowell notes, "it is marvelous in its mastery over that delightfully fortuitous inconsequence which is the adamant logic of dreamland."¹ Poe has an interesting passage on the "psychal fancies" arising in the soul "at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams";² and "Ligeia" and "Ulalume" give some idea of the strange world "out of space, out of time," through which his spirit passed.

Bunyan, who is the type in literature of native inspiration without culture, and who thus perhaps illustrates with special clearness the working of poetic imagination pure and untrammelled, constantly beheld visions under the stress of his religious emotion. As a child, he tells us, he committed terrible sins. These "did so offend the Lord, that even in my childhood he did scare and affright me with fearful dreams, and did terrify me with dreadful visions."³ External objects and events passed by him unnoticed, while "he looked upon that which was passing through his own mind and heart as though it were something external."³ Watching his brazier's fire, journeying alone through country roads, working mechanically in Bedford jail, he saw images and heard voices which were as clear and vivid to him as those of objective reality. Like Dunstan and Luther, he was tempted by the Devil in person, and yielded; he repented, and saw Christ himself looking down at him through the tiles of the house-roof, saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee." These appearances, says Taine, were "the products of an involuntary and impassioned imagination,

¹Literary and Political Addresses, "Coleridge."

²"Marginalia," Works, Virginia edition, Vol. XVI, p. 88.

³Grace Abounding, ed. Brown, pp. 9, xxiii.

which by its hallucinations, its mastery, its fixed ideas, its mad ideas, prepares the way for the poet, and announces an inspired man."¹ So Bunyan was, as his principal biographer styles him, essentially "The Dreamer."² His books are little more than a record of his dreams. "As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream." Thus begins *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as the title says, "in the similitude of a dream."

Shelley, the type of inspired poets, exhibited the same psychological character. "At no period of his life," says J. A. Symonds, "was he wholly free from visions which had the reality of facts. Sometimes they occurred in sleep, and were prolonged with painful vividness into his waking moments. Sometimes they seemed to grow out of his intense meditation, or to present themselves before his eyes as the projection of a powerful inner impression. All his sensations were abnormally acute, and his ever-active imagination confused the border lands of the actual and the visionary."³ The account, given by Hogg, of his "slumbers resembling a profound lethargy," tells us that "he lay occasionally upon the sofa, but more commonly stretched out before a large fire, like a cat; and his little round head was exposed to such a fierce heat, that I used to wonder how he was able to bear it. . His torpor was generally profound, but he would sometimes discourse incoherently for a long time in his sleep." Then "he would suddenly start up, and, rubbing his eyes with great violence, and passing his fingers swiftly through his long hair, would enter at once into a vehement argument, or begin to recite verses, either of his own composition or from the work of others, with a rapidity and an energy that were often quite painful."⁴ Curiously this bodily heat was with Shelley conducive to dreams and poetry. The "Cenci" was written in the warm sun on his

¹ English Literature, Book II, Chap. 5, Sec. 6.

² See, for example, the vision described in *Grace Abounding*, paragraph 53, with Bunyan's interpretation.

³ Shelley, p. 91.

⁴ Shelley, p. 30.

roof at Leghorn.¹ "When my brain gets heated with a thought," he said, "it soon boils."² In such a mood he wrote "The Triumph of Life." "The intense stirring of his imagination implied by this supreme poetic effort, the solitude of the Villa Magni, and the elemental fervor of Italian heat to which he recklessly exposed himself, contributed to make Shelley more than usually nervous. His somnambulism returned, and he saw visions. On one occasion he thought that the dead Allegra rose from the sea, and clapped her hands, and laughed and beckoned to him. On another he roused the whole house at night by his screams, and remained terror-frozen in the trance produced by an appalling vision."³ A study of Shelley's life shows that there is the closest connection between this power of vision and his poetical faculty. Perhaps Shelley's case was one of those which led Lamb to believe that the soul's creativeness in sleep furnishes a measure of the poetical faculty

Stevenson has a "Chapter on Dreams," describing his own experience, which is so instructive that if space permitted it should be quoted here entire.⁴ "He was from a child," he tells us, "an ardent and uncomfortable dreamer", as a child he had terrible dream-haunted nights. While a student in Edinburgh he began "to dream in sequence, and thus to lead a double life — one of the day, one of the night" — which soon sent him "trembling for his reason" to the doctor. He "had long been in the custom of setting himself to sleep with tales, and so had his father before him." It is not strange, then, that he "began to read in his dreams—tales, for the most part, and for the most part after the manner of G. P. R. James, but so incredibly more vivid and moving than any printed books, that he has ever since been malcontent with literature." "But presently," he continues, "my dreamer began to turn his former amusement of story telling to (what is called) account; by which I mean that he began to write and sell his tales. Here was he, and here were the little people who did that part

¹E. Dowden, *Life of Shelley*, p. 429.

²Symonds, *Shelley*, p. 166; see quotation, p. 26, below.

³*Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁴*Works*, Thistle Edition, Vol. XV, p. 250.

of his business, in quite new conditions. The stories must now be trimmed and pared and set upon all fours, they must run from a beginning to an end and fit (after a manner) with the laws of life; the pleasure in a word had become a business; and that not only for the dreamer but for the little people of his theatre. These understood the change as well as he. When he lay down to prepare himself for sleep, he no longer sought amusement, but printable and profitable tales; and after he had dozed off in his box-seat, his little people continued their evolutions with the same mercantile designs." Thus the scenes of some of Stevenson's tales, for instance of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," were first enacted in this dream theatre, and these tales were, as he represents them, a collaboration between himself and what he calls his "little people"—that is, between his conscious waking intellect and his dream faculty

These examples will perhaps serve to make more convincing the transition which we are now to make from dreams to poetry proper. The function of poetry also seems to be to represent the imaginary fulfilment of our ungratified wishes or desires. The poet Bacon says, "submits the shows of things to the desires of the mind." The poet is essentially a man filled with desire, unsatisfied, and it is in a state of dissatisfaction that poetry arises.¹ The lover, separated from his mistress, who falls to scribbling verses, is typical of all poets. The dissatisfaction inspiring poetry, however, may be of any kind. Burns parted from his Clarinda, Dante worshiping Beatrice from a distance, Byron suffering from oppression and unable to fight actively against it, Coleridge dissatisfied with life in England as he finds it, and dreaming of a Utopia on the banks of the Susquehanna, Wordsworth looking back to the time when the earth

"did seem

Apparelled in celestial light,"

are all in the mood for producing poetry. The poet does not live in the present; he hopes and aspires. "It is no mere appreciation of the beauty before us," says Poe, which inspires the poet, "but a wild effort to reach the beauty

¹Compare the theory of Ribot, *L'Imagination Créatrice*, p. 36; "C'est dans les besoins qu'il faut chercher la cause première de toutes les inventions."

above. It is the desire of the moth for the star."¹ The use of poetry is to afford an escape from reality; to transform the real world, by an effort of the poetic imagination, into an ideal world in accordance with our desires, our hopes, our aspirations. The use of poetry, Bacon says again, "hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it; the world being in proportion inferior to the soul, by reason whereof there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more compact goodness, and a more absolute variety, than can be found in the nature of things."² Byron expresses nearly the same thought in verse

" The beings of the mind are not of clay;
Essentially immortal, they create
And multiply in us a brighter ray
And more beloved existence: that which Fate
Prohibits to dull life, in this our state
Of mortal bondage, by these spirits supplied,
First exiles, then replaces what we hate;
Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,
And with a fresher growth replenishing the void."³

It is perhaps dangerous to generalize broadly and say that the use of all poetry is that which Bacon describes, that poetry uniformly represents the gratification of unsatisfied desires. Much goes under the name of poetry, satirical, humorous, and didactic, to which this description is not directly applicable. Poetry is broadly of two kinds — to employ a distinction of John Keble's which will be noticed later — primary, which is original and inspired, and secondary, which is second-hand, copying the forms of inspiration. There is Homer, and there are poets like those whom Plato describes as depending on Homer, as the successive iron rings on the magnet. Our principle applies only to the poetry of inspiration. Perhaps an imaginative lyric of pure joy would constitute an exception to the principle. It is doubtful, however, if unmixed joy is a poetical mood; if the note of sadness is not, as Shelley and Poe

¹"The Poetic Principle."

²The Advancement of Learning, Book II.

³Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, 5.

thought, inseparable from true poetry. Perhaps even in joy the heart remains unsatisfied; "it may still feel," as Poe says, "a petulant impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys of which . . . we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses."¹ Poetry, according to Wordsworth and Coleridge, always implies passion; and passion is properly suffering, dissatisfaction, the effect of desire. "Most wretched men," says Shelley, in "Julian and Maddalo,"

"Are cradled into poetry by wrong:

And learn in suffering what they teach in song."

Poetry expresses passion, and poetry expresses unsatisfied desire; I believe it is not psychologically incorrect to say that these two statements are fundamentally equivalent.

In judging the general principle above mentioned—that the end of poetry, as of dreams, is to satisfy desire—the reader should keep in mind two further considerations. First, that the gratification of poetry may extend no further than that derived from the idealized expression, which is in every case substituted for the imperfect and inhibited utterance of ordinary life. Secondly, that in poetry the poet's desires are not represented openly and literally; they are disguised, conveyed through a medium of fiction, bodied forth in strange forms as a result of the alchemic action, the "dream-work," of the poet's brain. The last point will be more fully considered later.

The poet is called creative, and his activity that of the creative imagination. "God without any travail to his divine imagination," says Puttenham, expressing the view of the older English critics, "made all the world of naught. Even so the very poet makes and combines out of his own brain both the verse and matter of his poem."² So Byron says of poetry

" 'Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image, even as I do now."³

¹"The Poetic Principle."

²*Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Arber, p. 19.

³*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III, 6.

And Shelley of the poet

"But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality"¹

The poet is called a creator because, as we have seen, he creates in an ideal world, according to our desires, what is lacking in the divinely created world of reality. His work is thus akin to the divine — "a repetition," as Coleridge calls it, "in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite *I am*."² He is essentially what the name signifies, *ποιητής*, a maker or creator. Poetry, as all the older and better critics agree, is not essentially expression in metrical language,—

"No jingling serenader's art
Nor tinkling of piano strings."³

Bacon, following Aristotle, calls poetry "feigned history," and includes under it all kinds of fiction. "The poet is a maker, as his name signifies," says Dryden, "and he who cannot make, that is, invent, has his name for nothing." Fiction, moreover, is essentially equivalent to poetry, as its etymology would suggest — coming from the Latin *fingere* , related to *facere* , it signifies a making or creation.⁴ The German *Dichtung* comprises both poetry and fiction; indeed, by older English critics plays and novels are frequently called poems, even when written in prose. The essential activity of the writer of plays and novels is the same as that of the poet; he also creates in an ideal world, subjecting the shows of things to the desires of the mind. The word poetry, therefore, will be used here throughout, as the equivalent of *Dichtung* , to include every work of creative imagination in literature, whether in prose or verse.

The poets have traditionally been considered prophets.

¹Prometheus Unbound, Act I, Sc. 1.

²Biographia Literaria, Chap. XIII.

³Emerson, Merlin.

⁴To this creation the imitation of Aristotle is essentially equivalent. It is not an imitation of nature in the ordinary sense, but a sublimation of nature; or, more exactly, a *mimic creation*, arising partly from the natural propensity of men to copy what they see in nature, and partly from the poetic or fictioning propensity mentioned above. See S. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, Chap. IV, particularly pp. 150, 153.

Apollo was the god of poetry and of the oracles. "The oracles of Delphos and Sibylla's prophecies were wholly delivered in verses"; as those of Mother Shipton and of the present day fortune-teller are in jingling rhymes. The same is true "of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies." To the bard, the seer, and the prophet have been attributed the same character and inspiration. This view is still confidently held. After noting that in earlier epochs poets were called legislators and prophets, Shelley says: "A poet essentially comprises and unites both of these characters. For he not only beholds the present intensely as it is and discovers the laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and fruit of latest time." Emerson believes that poets are still inspired to prophecy,—as in "Merlin":

"There are open hours
When the God's will sallies free
And the dull idiot might see
The flowing fortunes of a thousand years."

What is the explanation of this union of poetry and prophecy? Perhaps in part it lies merely in the fact that the poet is a man of wide learning and observation, of free and comprehensive thought, who, employing an imagination of the merely practical order, akin to that of the merchant forecasting the coming year in business, "beholds the future in the present" and foretells it. Thus Shelley foresaw future events in Irish politics.¹ A deeper explanation is suggested, however, by the apparition of Goethe, mentioned above. The poet in his poetry expresses his desires, primarily his own desires, but also, through his well-known universal and representative character, the desires of others—of his class or country, of mankind. Great poets are great for that reason, because their writings give "some shadow of satisfaction" to the minds of all men. What the

¹Symonds, Shelley, pp. 62, 63. Shelley had strange premonitions of his death by drowning; see p. 154. Blake, taken by his father to Ryland's studio, said, after leaving, "Father, I do not like the man's face; it looks as if he will live to be hanged"—which he was, twelve years later. See Gilchrist's Life, Vol. I, p. 13. Perhaps we had better leave such strange prophecies unexplained.

great poet desires all men desire; he is only their spokesman. And what all men desire they strive earnestly to obtain, and will obtain eventually As Lowell says,

“The dreams which nations dream come true,
And shape the world anew.”¹

Thus the connection between poetry and prophecy becomes at least partially explicable and comprehensible to us. It is no marvel if in this way the poet sees “the flowing fortunes of a thousand years.” The range of prophecy is as great as that of human desire or aspiration. For example, “The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field, which is indeed the least of all seeds: but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” This, though not to be definitely interpreted, is poetry and prophecy — a prophecy which apparently has required and will require great length of time for its fulfilment. Even the beautiful vision of John, who was carried away in the spirit and saw a great city, the street whereof was pure gold, as it were transparent glass, will one day, let us all hope, be realized.

“Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words, *vaticinium* and *vaticinari*, is manifest, so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge.”² The poet, the prophet, and the priest are one, because the best of religion is prophecy and poetry of the highest kind. The true priest sees truth by subjecting the shows of things to the desires of the mind — to our highest desires or aspirations. The true priest, as we shall see presently, like the poet, also ministers to the peace and comfort of mankind. At the present time, when prophecy is no longer believed in, when poetry is too often regarded as mere versifying or artistry, and when religion is so much in need of inspired ministers, it will help us to recognize the common character in these three things, which the men of old wisely joined together and which we have put asunder.

¹“Ode to France.”

²Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, ed. Cook, p. 5.

II

Poetry, then, like dreams, affords expression and imagined gratification to our desires. If our desires are actually gratified, our poetry, like our dreams, becomes prophetic. The explanation is in both cases the same. Let us follow the parallel further.

Dreams, according to Dr Freud, are not, excepting those of children, inspired by conscious desires, but by unconscious ones.¹ Sometimes, it is true, the manifest content of a dream shows without distortion the fulfilment of a wish of which the dreamer is entirely conscious; more often also such a conscious wish is discovered in the latent content on analysis; in every case, however, as appears on fuller analysis, these conscious wishes are associated with and merely re-enforce deeper unconscious ones, which are the fundamental motives to the dream activity. Thus no wish is capable of producing a dream which is not unconscious or associated with another wish which is unconscious. This, for its explanation, requires some knowledge of a part of Dr Freud's psychological theory which is fundamentally important, namely, that which deals with psychic repression. Only such desires remain in our consciousness as are "acceptable to consciousness." Certain desires cannot possibly be gratified because they meet with actual external hindrances. Others cannot be gratified because their gratification would be incompatible with our duty — our obligations towards others. In either instance there is a conflict between the selfish individual impulse and objective circumstances — environment; the case being the same whether the hindrance to gratification is physical, lying in an actual impediment, or moral, arising from the individual's regard for law, morality, custom, or the opinion of others. Such desires, since they are incapable of being expressed in activity calculated to secure gratification, are not worth retention in consciousness. They are, moreover, inevitably unpleasurable — painful to the individual, and

¹Dr. Freud uses the term *unconscious* to denote mental processes which cannot spontaneously be recalled to consciousness, — which are recalled only under unusual circumstances or by artificial means. For the theory of this section see *Die Traumdeutung*, VII.

because painful, they are by a defensive process, repressed. These desires, however, are still proper to the individual; they are not removed, but only transferred to unconsciousness; and there remain operative. That is, they are still capable of starting various mental processes. One of these processes is that of dreams. Our unconscious wishes — those which are impracticable, or which are painful, shameful, or otherwise intolerable, and thus are driven from our conscious waking minds — are fulfilled for us in sleep. And biologically considered, the function of dreams is this, — that they satisfy and allay mental activities which otherwise would disturb sleep. By affording a necessary expression or discharge they secure mental repose. The dream is thus the “guardian of sleep.” The function of day dreams and hallucinations is doubtless the same — to relieve the overburdened mind and secure a comfort not to be found in the presence of reality.¹ Speaking of the apparition already mentioned, Goethe says: “Whatever the explanation of these things may be, the wonderful phantom gave me at that moment of separation some alleviation.”

Some readers may be inclined to doubt the existence of this repression, of unconscious desires, and in general of the “unconscious” which plays so large a part in Dr. Freud’s theory. They may be inclined to believe that a person is definitely aware at any moment what his desires are, and his motives for action; and that unconscious desires and motives are a fiction. Such a belief is, as we shall see in a moment, strongly opposed by the best evidence in literature. “The uttered part of a man’s life,” as Carlyle observes, “bears to the unuttered unconscious part a small unknown proportion; he himself never knows it, much less do others.”²

If poetry then, as we have seen, like dreams, has for its purpose the imaginary gratification of our desires, it also, like dreams, proceeds from an unconscious rather than a conscious mental activity, and has its origin in unconscious sources. Poetry is not produced by the poet spontaneously, by a voluntary action of the intellect; it emerges

¹Cf. *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 304.

Essays, “Sir Walter Scott.”

involuntarily and unconsciously as the result of a hidden activity, which, therefore, we cannot readily investigate, and which we call, without attaching definite meaning to the words, that of the "poetic imagination." Poetry, as Shelley declares, is "created by that imperial faculty whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man."¹ The attitude of the poet is never that of the man of science, who can trace his work definitely step by step from inception to completion; it is rather that of Voltaire, who, on seeing one of his tragedies performed, exclaimed, "Was it really I who wrote that?" The testimony of poets and critics to this effect is universal and familiar to every student of literature. It seems advisable, however, to quote from some of them.

"Many are the noble words in which poets speak concerning the actions of men," Plato makes Socrates say, "but . . . they do not speak of them by any rules of art; they are simply inspired to utter that to which the Muse impels them. God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses divines and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know them to be speaking not of themselves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God himself is the speaker, and that through them he is conversing with us."² According to Spenser, poetry is "no art, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct, not to be gotten by labor and learning, but adorned with both, and poured into the witte by a certain Enthousiasmos or celestiall inspiration."³ The imagination, on the authority of Shakespeare, "bodies forth the forms of things unknown."⁴

The expressions of more recent poets and critics are to the same effect. This "instinct of the imagination," says Hazlitt, "works unconsciously like nature, and receives its impressions from a kind of inspiration."⁵ Scott, the

¹Defense of Poetry, ed. Cook, p. 7.

²Ion, Jowett's Translation, third edition, Vol. I, p. 502.

³Quoted with part of the preceding, by Woodberry, *The Inspiration of Poetry*, p. 2.

⁴Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V, Sc. 1.

⁵English Comic Writers, ed. W. C. Hazlitt, p. 147.

sanest of poets, says "In sober reality, writing good verses seems to depend upon something separate from the volition of the author."¹ George Eliot, living in the clear light of modern science, declared "that in all she considered her best writing there was a 'not herself' which took possession of her, and that she felt her own personality to be merely the instrument through which this spirit, as it were, was acting."² Goethe says: "There is a sense in which it is true that poets, and indeed all true artists must be born and not made. Namely, there must be an inward productive power to bring the images that linger in the organs, in the memory, in the imagination, freely without purpose or will to life." This is the opinion of those we should call poets of art as well as of poets of inspiration. "It is not well in works of creation," Schiller writes, "that reason should too closely challenge the ideas which come thronging to the doors. In a creative brain reason has withdrawn her watch at the doors, and ideas crowd in pell-mell." Voltaire wrote to Diderot: "It must be confessed that in the arts of genius instinct is everything. Corneille composed the scene between Horatius and Curiatius just as the bird builds its nest."⁴

Voltaire's expressive figure agrees curiously with that in Emerson's "Problem," which with "Spiritual Laws" throws much light on this subject:

"Know'st thou what wove yon woodbird's nest
Of leaves, and feathers from her breast?
Or how the fish outbuilt her shell,
Painting with morn her annual cell?

"The hand that rounded Peter's dome
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome
Wrought in a sad sincerity:
Himself from God he could not free;
He builded better than he knew; —
The conscious stone to beauty grew.

¹Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, Chap. XXXVIII, Letter to Lady L. Stuart.

²Cross, *Life of George Eliot*.

³Quoted by Hirsch, *Genius*, pp. 31-33.

⁴April 20, 1773.

"These temples grew as grows the grass;
Art might obey, but not surpass.
The passive Master lent his hand
To the vast soul that o'er him planned."

We may stop a moment more over two writers whom we have already considered in some detail — Bunyan and Shelley. Taine writes of Bunyan's imagination: "Powerful as that of an artist, but more vehement, this imagination worked in the man without his co-operation, and besieged him with visions which he had neither willed nor foreseen. From that moment there was in him, as it were, a second self, ruling the first, grand and terrible, whose apparitions were sudden, its motions unknown, which redoubled or crushed his faculties, prostrated or transported him, bathed him in the sweat of agony, ravished him with trances of joy, and which by its force, strangeness, independence, impressed upon him the presence and the action of a foreign and superior master."¹

Shelley's inspiration must have been of a similar order. Trelawny tells of finding Shelley alone one day in a wood near Pisa, with the manuscript of one of his lyrics: "It was a frightful scrawl, words smeared out with his fingers, and one upon another, over and over in tiers, and all run together in the most admired disorder. . . . On my observing this to him, he answered, 'When my brain gets heated with a thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning when cooled down, out of the rude sketch, as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing.'"² We have seen that with Shelley bodily heat was conducive to dreams and poetry. So here he describes the heat of inspiration, as he does also in the following from the *Defense of Poetry*: "Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the color of a flower

¹English Literature, Book II, Chap. V, Sec. 6.

²Symonds, Shelley, p. 166.

which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious fortunes of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.”

Poetical creation, then is generally described as an instinctive and unconscious process. Poetry is not a conscious product of the intellect, but the manifestation or symptom of an inner uncontrolled activity. What does this mean? We have seen that poetry is the expression of desires. Is it not natural to suppose that the desires of the poet, as of the dreamer, are impeded and consequently repressed,— forced back into unconsciousness. These desires are prevented from serving as motives for conscious action looking toward gratification, thus failing of expression they become unconscious but still remain operative in another manner — that is, in starting an activity affording a fictional gratification. If this is the case then poetry, like dreams, has its source in repressed and unconscious desires. Let us see what further support is to be found in literature for this view.

In one of his critical essays, which has been too much overlooked, John Keble “proposes by way of conjecture” the following definition: “Poetry is the indirect expression in words, most appropriately in metrical words, of some overpowering emotion, ruling taste, or feeling, the direct indulgence whereof is somehow repressed.”¹ Keble’s exposition of this definition is well worth the reader’s attention. As a whole it cannot be even summarized here. Some parts of it, dealing with the nature of the poet’s indirect expression, with the function of metre, and with the kinds of poetry, will be noticed later. For the present we are concerned with Keble’s theory of repression in poetry — which is in substance that poetry is the expression of repressed emotion, or, substituting terms which he uses on another page, of repressed “desire or regret.”² Keble says nothing of the unconscious origin or production of poetry; otherwise his theory is obviously in general agreement with that

¹The British Critic, Vol. XXIV, p. 426, — a review of Lockhart’s Life of Scott, reprinted in Occasional Papers and Reviews, 1877. See also Keble’s *De Poeticae Vi Medicâ; Praelectiones Academicæ Oxonii Habitæ*, 1844.

²Keble’s theory is founded on Aristotle’s; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 428, 435. He perhaps does some violence to Aristotle’s *imitation* in translating it *expression*; but his theory is in substantial agreement with Aristotle’s.

suggested in the preceding pages. There is no element of poetry in the direct indulgence, or expression, of feeling. It is only when this indulgence, or expression, is impeded that poetry arises. Thus a speech which contrives by association or allusion to expose a hidden feeling, or a face which by a sudden and fleeting play of feature conveys an otherwise incommunicable motion of the heart, we feel to be "expressive," or "poetical." It gives pleasure by overcoming difficulty and obviating repression. We call a landscape poetical "when we feel that it answers, or tends to express, and by expression to soothe or develop, as the case may be, some state more or less complicated of human thought and feeling," for which we can find no words. Poetry expresses what by other means is inexpressible. The impediment to expression may be of any nature. Perhaps the "very excess and violence" of the emotions "make the utterance of them almost impossible"; perhaps the emotions "in their unrestrained expression would appear too keen and outrageous to kindle fellow feeling"; perhaps there is in the writer's mind an "instinctive delicacy" which shrinks from communication. In any case direct expression being impossible a veiled or poetical one is the recourse.

For some expression is necessary; the emotions must have vent. What Keble calls "the instinctive wish to communicate" must be satisfied.¹ "All men," Emerson says, "live by truth, and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression."² Thus to "open one's mind" is healthful and comforting. The lover is relieved if he can confess his passion. The man in anger must "speak his mind" or "have it out." And the same in grief; "he often finds present helpe who does his grieffe impart."³ On the other hand, the repression of emotion is painful and dangerous. "That way madness lies."

"Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak,
Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."⁴

¹See Hirsch, *Genius*, pp. 43-45.

²Essays, "The Poet."

³Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II, i, 46.

⁴Macbeth, Act IV, Sc. 3.

This helps to explain the cause and use of poetry. We have seen that the function of dreams is to prevent the disturbance of sleep, that of poetry is entirely analogous. "Here, no doubt," says Keble, "is one final cause of poetry: to innumerable persons it acts as a safety valve, tending to preserve them from mental disease." Or, as Newman expresses it: "Poetry is a method of relieving the overburdened mind; it is a channel through which emotion finds expression, and that a safe, regulated expression." It accomplishes "thus a *cleansing*," as Aristotle would word it, "of the sick soul."¹

The testimony of poets supports this view. Goethe speaks of his habit "of converting whatever rejoiced, or worried or otherwise concerned me into a poem and so have done with it, and thus at once to correct my conception of outward things and to set my mind at rest." "Sing I must," he makes Tasso say, "else life's not life." Schiller, speaking of some of his lyrics, says: "They are too true for the individual to be called poetry proper; for in them the individual appeases his need and alleviates his burden."² "I kittle up my rustic reed," says Burns in his Epistle to W. Simson, "it gies me ease", and to the same effect in a letter to Moore "My passions raged like to many devils till they got vent in rhyme, and then conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet."³ Wordsworth must have found relief in poetical expression:

"To me alone there came a thought of grief;
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong."⁴

Essays Critical and Historical, "John Keble."

²Quoted by Hirsch, *Genius*, pp. 45, 50.

³August 2, 1787 Cf. also "The Vision":

"I taught thee how to pour in song,
To soothe thy pain."

⁴"Intimations of Immortality." Cf. Tennyson, "In Memoriam," v, 2:

"But for the unquiet heart and brain,
A use in measured language lies;
The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics numbing pain."

But this is a relief of another sort,— mechanic rather than truly poetic.

Mr Kipling seems to have understood this matter. Introducing the tale of the "Phantom Rickshaw" and speaking of its supposed narrator, he says: "When he recovered I suggested that he should write out the whole affair from beginning to end, knowing that ink might assist him to ease his mind. When little boys have learned a new bad word they are never happy until they have chalked it upon a door. And this also is literature."¹ The little boy clearing his mind by expression is, as Mr. Kipling suggests, typical of the later poet.

This use of poetry to the poet explains, in part at least, its value to the reader. The poet provides expression not merely for himself, but, by virtue of his representative character, for his readers as well. One who reads, not as a student or a connoisseur for an ulterior purpose, but for the true pleasure and satisfaction which the reading affords, finds in poetry the expression not of another's feeling but of his own. He identifies himself with the poet and himself lives through the poem, the poet is only his spokesman, providing him with the needed outlet for his pent emotion; for him, too, the poem expresses what would otherwise remain inexpressible. Thus countless readers find relief and comfort in poetry. And this explains, in part at least, the pleasure which poetry affords. It is a pleasure of satisfied desire, akin to the pleasure of actual satisfaction,— the satisfaction in this case being an imaginary or fictional one, a substitute for the actual, but affording a similar pleasure. The use of poetry, Bacon says, is "to give some *shadow* of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it."

The reader will remember that we are throughout employing the term poetry broadly to include all creative literature: what has just been said therefore applies to fiction generally, to the novel and the drama. Men are fatigued with the business of life, they are preyed upon by unpleasant feelings, they suffer from a tension which requires relaxation. They read a novel or go to the theatre, and find supplied in fiction what is wanting to them in reality. They

¹Kipling omits the last two sentences in some editions of the "Phantom Rickshaw."

feel what Keble calls the *vis medica poetica*, after living in this world of fiction they

"With peace and consolation are dismissed
And calm of mind, all passion spent."¹

This view of poetry as a safe and regulated expression for emotion will perhaps supply some commentary to Aristotle's definition of tragedy. The function of tragedy, according to this definition, is "to effect through pity and fear the *katharsis* or purgation of these emotions." This definition is not necessarily inconsistent with our description of poetry as satisfying desire. Shelley observes "Sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself, are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends upon this principle—tragedy delights by affording a shadow of that pleasure which exists in pain."² The Aristotelian *katharsis*, at any rate, is related to the *vis medica* which we have explained. It is not a moral but primarily a psychic cleansing, or curative process, aimed at a pathological condition of the mind. *Katharsis* is a medical term; in "the language of the school of Hippocrates it strictly denotes the removal of a painful or disturbing element from the organism, by the elimination of alien matter."³ "Applying this to tragedy," says Professor Butcher, "we observe that the feelings of pity and fear in real life contain a morbid or disturbing element."⁴ In the process of tragic excitation they find relief, and the morbid element is thrown off. The curative or tranquilizing influence that tragedy exercises follows as an immediate accompaniment of the transformation of feeling." Thus to the Greeks a dramatic representation was not merely a means of amusement, but a great public and sacred rite of purification.⁵

¹Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, last two lines.

²Defense of Poetry, ed. Cook, p. 35.

³Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry*, p. 253.

⁴Students of Dr. Freud's theory will understand why fear should contain a morbid or disturbing element,—fear being the conversion of repressed desire.

⁵This, however, is an unguarded statement. For it is also one purpose of our amusements to cleanse the sick mind. Play is the idealizing fiction of the child as poetry is of man. It is appropriate, therefore, that we should call our dramatic performances *plays*.

It is interesting to find that those who practise the method originated by Dr.

The conclusion, then, to which this evidence leads is that poetry is the expression of repressed and unconscious desires; and that the function of poetry, biologically considered, like that of dreams, is to secure to us mental repose and hence health and well-being. Poetry "cleanses the sick soul." Might this be one reason why Apollo had for his province not only poetry but healing, the two things being thus intimately related as means to end?

Freud, for dealing with psychoneuroses, speak of it as the *cathartic* method. The essential feature of this method is that it provides expression for repressed emotions, these constituting "a painful and disturbing element in the organism"; it effects "the elimination of alien matter." This mere expression has been found curative in psychoneuroses. The Greeks were apparently familiar with a *cathartic* treatment for morbid emotional states, persons afflicted with madness or "enthusiasm" being treated by music, which accomplished an emotional cleansing analogous to that accomplished by tragedy. Persons so treated, says Aristotle, "fall back into their normal state, as if they had undergone a medical or purgative treatment." Perhaps this is one of the matters which the Greeks understood better than we. See Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry*, Chap. IX; cf. Plato, *Charmides*, Jowett's translation, third edition, Vol. I, p. 13.

III

Let us now again return to the subject of dreams. Dreams, as has been said, have their origin in the depths of the mind, in unconscious mental processes,— that is, in processes which do not come to our knowledge except indirectly, or under unusual or abnormal conditions,— the conditions supplied, for example, in dreams, in day dreams and hallucinations, and in certain neurotic activities. Under ordinary conditions there is a force operating to prevent these processes from rising to the surface of consciousness. If the reader has ever tried to recall any matter — for example, a proper name — which has fallen out of his recollection, and which he can almost but not quite recollect; if he has felt himself, so to speak, struggling to recover this matter and baffled in his efforts, he can form some idea of the repressive force in question.¹ This force is called in the dream theory the “psychic censor”, it “stands at the gateway of consciousness.” In general, it prevents the deeper processes from becoming conscious. Under certain conditions, however, when this force is relaxed, as in sleep, it allows the repressed material to pass, or permits an evasion. That is, it permits such material to pass, but only in a disguised and distorted form, under which it escapes recognition. The so-called psychic censor, as its name implies, resembles a public censorial officer, say of the political press, who will not allow unpleasant truth to pass for publication, but may be evaded by a veiled or disguised representation. In dreams the latent content is under repression, it passes the

¹ Freud explains this amnesia as caused by a connection between such a name and material which is under repression. See *Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, p. 3.

ensor only in a disguised and distorted form, in which it becomes unrecognizable — that is, in the form of the manifest content.

The operations by which, under the direction of the censor, the underlying thoughts are transformed into the apparent dream are called the “dream work” (*Traumarbeit*).¹ They cannot be fully explained here, this being the most complex and difficult part of the dream theory. Through these operations, however—described technically as “condensation,” “displacement,” “secondary elaboration,” etc.—the underlying thought is in appearance completely transformed; it is bodied forth in a strange guise which bears little or no resemblance to the original. This explains why dreams appear absurd and incomprehensible; only when these disguises have been stripped off, only when the work of the censor has been retraced and undone, do they disclose their underlying thought. An interpretation of dreams, then, requires a knowledge of the dream work.

In this transformation, however, one element remains unchanged. A dream is always emotional, and the emotion which has properly belonged to the original dream-thoughts still clings to the final dream, where sometimes it seems strangely out of place. That is, intense feeling is sometimes attached to apparently most trivial things, the explanation for this being that feeling is transferred to these things from the more important ones in the original for which they stand. Whatever strange forms the dream may take this emotion is real and vital; “im Traume ist der Affect das einzig Wahre.”

Some features of this transformation, effected by the dream work, require for our purposes further explanation. The dream is fictional in two senses. In the first place it represents an ungratified desire as gratified, substituting for the *utinam* of the latent content a phantasm of gratification. In the second place it represents the abstract by a symbolical concrete. The underlying material, the elements from which the dream is formed, with the desires as motive power, may be anything which finds place in the human mind — persons and places, thoughts and opinions,

¹Die Traumdeutung, VI.

facts observed or inferences from facts, concretions or abstractions. In the dream these elements are reduced or transposed into one simple form. The dream, as a rule, represents not thoughts but actions. In a dream we take part in an action as one of the actors, or see a situation before our eyes. A dream is a kind of dramatic representation, a series of scenes in that theatre of the brain which Stevenson describes; and only such elements as are capable of being put upon the scene can pass into the dream. A thought cannot be directly represented; it must be enacted, and therefore the dream makes constant use of symbols. The symbolism of the wildest poet falls short of the symbolism constantly employed in dreams. Temporal relations cannot be represented, in a dream the time is always present. Logical relations cannot be represented, the dream cannot deal directly with an *if* or a *because*. Such temporal or logical relations must be expressed, if at all, somehow indirectly in accordance with the dramatic principle. Thus a dream is mainly visual in nature. It may include sounds and other sensations. It is, however, properly a *vision*. All underlying elements must either be suitable ingredients of a vision or be transformed into such ingredients,—made visible, or at least sensible. The dreamer, then, sees a vision representing symbolically the gratification of his wish.

Dreams often take us back to the experiences of early childhood. The reader has, perhaps, like the writer, found this one interesting feature of his dreams,—that they sometimes bring up long-forgotten incidents, faces, emotions, with surprising vividness. In dreams, as Dryden says,

“Sometimes forgotten things long cast behind
Rush forward in the brain and come to mind.
The nurse’s legends are for truth received,
And the man dreams but what the boy believed.”¹

Day dreams also often take us back to childhood. Drowning persons are said to see their whole lives, including events in early life long lost from conscious remembrance, in the twinkling of an eye; perhaps this vision is somehow related—

¹ The Cock and the Fox, ll. 333–336.

the projection of an instinctive, sudden, strong desire to live. Such early memories appear recognizably in the manifest content of dreams; according to Dr. Freud they appear even more frequently in the latent content. Indeed, the latent content of every dream probably goes back for some of its elements, for a part at least of the desires which actuate it, to the experiences of childhood. These experiences have perhaps been entirely forgotten; the early desires have been for some reason repressed. They reappear, however, in dreams, in which we live back into childhood again. "Das Träumen," says Dr. Freud, "ist ein Stück des überwundenen Kinderseelenlebens."¹ The dream usually seizes upon some trivial incident of the preceding day — trivial because such incidents will be free of associations—and makes this a starting-point or point of crystallization, to which the old experiences may attach themselves. But the old experiences are the important elements. The significance of these facts for our purpose we shall see presently when we return to poetry. Just as the dream materials are largely derived from childhood, so in dreams we act and feel as children; we escape into an irresponsible world of play which has its only counterpart in childhood. In recounting our dreams we laugh at our strange actions in them, as we should laugh at the actions of children. In general the dream experiences, as compared with those of waking, have a kind of freshness and vigorous youthfulness about them as if they stood nearer to life's source.

The mental activity which produces dreams is different from that of ordinary waking life. It is apparently more simple, elementary, or central — perhaps we may say more childlike. A faculty is at work, which is active also in waking, but here works in a different way or under different control. This is an image-making faculty or imagination,—the phantasy (*φαντασία*) to which Aristotle attributes dreams, hallucinations, and illusions. This faculty is situated between the senses on the one hand and the intellect on the other, reproducing images derived through the senses, combining these under the direction of the intellect, and fur-

¹ *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 349.

nishing material for thought.¹ Thus in waking moments it is under the control of the intellect. But when the mind is relaxed — at rest or asleep — when it is not on the one hand taking in new sensations or on the other engaged in thought, this faculty, continuing active, answers other more recondite purposes. It subjects itself to the hidden desires of the mind and produces pictures at the instance of these desires. It is, so to speak, no longer at work, but at play. As Dryden says:

“Dreams are but interludes which fancy makes;
When monarch reason sleeps this mimic wakes.”²

The pictures which this faculty produces when it escapes from the control of the intellect, as in dreams, we call *fantastic*.

We may now return to poetry. We have seen that the motive impulse in poetry is supplied by the poet's desires. There are repressive forces, corresponding to the censor of the dream theory, which conflict with and control the poetic impulse. These forces have already been mentioned, they are the impediments to expression of Keble's theory. The selfish individual impulse cannot give itself free expression, it must have regard for appearances, for convention, for morality. This matter will be considered more fully later. In general the conflict is between the native inspiration of the poet and external authority of whatever kind, the principle of control arises from the latter.

This may be illustrated most readily in the form of poetry, its rhythm and metre, which gives utterance to both elements—the impulse and the control — or is also, like the subject matter, produced by their conflict. Strong and unrestrained emotion expresses itself in waves, with a throbbing or pulsation, in recurrent movements appearing in voice and gesture, which constitute a natural rhythm. Poetry, an emotional expression, has this rhythm. The beat of a passage of poetry or impassioned prose is not a superadded ornament, but an inevitable and vital accompaniment of such expression, going back, we may imagine,

¹ E. Wallace, *Aristotle's Psychology*, p. lxxvii.

² *The Cock and the Fox*, ll. 325-326.

for its origin to the poet's heart. It is, as Shelley says, an "echo of the eternal music." In a free expression this rhythm would be bound by no law but that imposed by the feeling itself. In certain poets of a primitive or strongly individual kind, for instance in Ossian or Walt Whitman, it is felt in something like its native wildness and force. Usually, however, it is restrained by regard for the traditions and conventions of the poetic style. In Tennyson, for example, it has become conventionalized — subjected to prosodial law. The rhythm has become measured, metrical; it has been adapted to recognized forms of line and stanza.

The nature and cause of this metrical restraint are well stated by Keble. "The conventional rules of metre and rhythm may be no less useful, in throwing a kind of veil over those strong and deep emotions, which need relief, but cannot endure publicity. The very circumstance of their being expressed in verse draws off attention from the violence of the feelings themselves, and enables people to say things which they could not express in prose, much in the same way as the musical accompaniment gives meaning to the gestures of the dance, and hinders them from appearing to the bystanders merely fantastic. This effect of metre seems quite obvious as far as regards the sympathies of others. Emotions which in their unrestrained expression would appear too keen and outrageous to kindle fellow feeling in any one are mitigated and become comparatively tolerable, not to say interesting to us, when we find them so far under control as to leave those who feel them at liberty to pay attention to measure and rhyme, and the other expedients of metrical composition. But over and above the effect on others, we apprehend that even in a writer's own mind there commonly exists a sort of instinctive delicacy, which finds its account in the work of arranging lines and syllables, and is content to utter, by their aid, what it would have shrunk from setting down in the language of conversation, the metrical form thus furnishing, at the same time, a vent for eager feelings, and a veil of reserve to draw over them."¹

¹British Critic, Vol. XXIV, p. 435. Cf. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chap. XVIII, on the origin of metre.

The form of poetry, then, is the product of two forces — the rhythmic impulse, and the control represented by metre, line, stanza, and the like.¹ The natural rhythm of unrestrained emotion would be unpleasing to a hearer as wanting in regard for this hearer — as wanting art; it must accordingly be reduced to recognized forms. It must not, however, be lost in this reduction, but must be felt constantly behind and through these forms giving them animation. In a poet like Shelley, in whom the poetic impulse is strong, the natural rhythm is always so felt, it even constantly threatens to break through the bonds of form and secure its freedom. In Pope, in whom the poetic impulse is weak, or at any rate in some of the followers of Pope, in whom native impulse is wanting, the form is everything, and the echo of the eternal music is entirely lost. The old question, whether or not metre is essential to poetry, must be answered formally, as the best critics from Aristotle to Wordsworth have answered it, in the negative; in every tolerable literary expression, however,— even in that other harmony of poetical prose, which has not only its rhythm but its laws no less exacting than those of verse — there must be, or will be, not only the element of inspiration but the element of control, which in poetry employs metre as one of its commonest instruments. Art as well as inspiration is essential to poetry.

The principle thus illustrated in the form of poetry may be applied also to its substance. The significant figure of the veil which Keble twice applies to the form, he employs again in describing the substance, in which the same controlling forces are at work. "In the prose romances of Sir Walter Scott," he says, "and in all others which would be justly considered poetical, it will be found, we believe, that the story is, in fact, interposed as a kind of transparent veil between the listener and the narrator's real drift and feelings." Scott's ruling passion, his desire to live

¹ Rhyme has the effect of dividing the expression into lines of regular length recognizable by the ear. Intrinsically, however, it goes back probably to a primitive or childish fondness for playing and jingling with the sound of words without regard to their meaning. For this impulse in children, see Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*, p. 105.

in the past and to make the past live again, met, as Keble shows, various checks, it could, however, be freely expressed in the guise of a story. This case is typical; every creative poetical work is such a veiled representation. The deep feeling of the poet cannot have a direct but only an indirect, or, so to speak, *censored* expression, through the medium of what Keble calls "associations more or less accidental." The poet's product, like the dream, is a fiction in two senses. In the first place, it is a phantasy representing an actually ungratified desire as gratified. In the second place, this representation is not direct but indirect or veiled; it is allegorical, figurative, or symbolic. It lets one thing stand for another and by this means bodies forth, in concrete sensible forms, the hidden motions of the soul of the poet. Or, as Shelley beautifully expresses the same thought, "it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide — abide, because there is no portal of expression from the cavern of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things."¹

The characteristic operation of the poet's mind, then, consists in an embodying of his deep feelings, his unconscious desires, in the fictional forms which we recognize as customary in and proper to poetry. This operation, however, or the modes in which this embodiment is effected, are untraced and obscure. The final product of the poetic imagination, the manifest poetry, is a complex construction, or, to employ a probably better word, a complex vital growth, out of the depths of the poetic mind. We can only surmise, for example, by what strange organic action the religious emotion of John Bunyan gathered to its use the sensations, experiences, thoughts, available associations of whatever kind, contained in the dreamer's mind, and thus grew into the series of scenes which make up *Pilgrim's Progress*. In order to trace this complex operation we should have to know, more fully than we can ever know it, the history of this poet—

¹Defense of Poetry, ed. Cook, p. 41.

his early training, his experiences, the people he met, the books he read, the sermons he heard — the whole growth and content of his mind. If we had all these facts as data, and if we knew the working of the poetic faculty, then we might trace the growth of his poetic product from its original moving emotion to its final form. We have not the data and we do not know the working of the poetic faculty. There is, we may conjecture, trusting to the parallel we have been following, a “poetic work”— *Dichterarbeit* — corresponding to the dream work already referred to. If we were familiar with the mechanisms of the former, as according to Dr. Freud we now are with the latter, then doubtless — given the necessary biographical data — we might analyze poetry, like dreams, to discover its underlying motives and sources. Perhaps a study of Dr. Freud’s mechanisms of condensation, displacement, etc., might throw much light on the working of the poetic faculty. Perhaps, for example, the extraordinary concision and significance of poetry, as compared with prose, is not due to mere brevity or ellipsis, but partly to “condensation,” in the sense in which this term is used in the dream theory — that is, to the fact that each portion of the poetic product is “over-determined,” and has many roots in the poet’s mind.¹ We cannot fully explore the field thus indicated at this point.

Some observations, however, may be made. Poetry, like the dream, is always a product of emotion. “No literary expression,” says Theodore Watts, in his admirable essay on the subject, “can, properly speaking, be called poetry that is not in a certain deep sense emotional.”² And just as in the transformation of the dream the original feeling of the dreamer passes through without change of quality and attaches itself to the manifest dream, so probably in the transformation of poetry the original feeling of the poet retains its original tone if not its original intensity; though all else may be fiction, this remains real; the final poem, whatever fictitious expression it may employ, is transfused with the true feeling of the poet’s heart. Thus the genuine feature of poetry lies in its feeling; this may attach itself to

¹For condensation, see *Die Traumdeutung*, p. 204.

²*Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Poetry.”

the wildest fiction; but the fiction still appeals to us as essentially truthful because it is animated by truth.

Poetry again, like the dream, is concrete in its method; and the ingredients of poetry like the ingredients of the dream must conform to this principle of composition. Poetry is correctly defined by David Masson as "the art of producing a fictitious concrete."¹ "With abstractions," to quote again from Theodore Watts, "the poet has nothing to do, save to take them and turn them into concretions." The poet may think as well as feel; he may start with abstract truths, but his thoughts and his truths are only the underlying elements of his poetry. The thoughts cannot be expressed directly; they must be reduced to concrete terms, appropriately embodied in the actions of things and persons, expressed in the proper poetic language of figures and symbols. So one evidence of Goethe's poetic mastery, according to Carlyle, was his "singularly emblematic intellect; his perpetual never-failing tendency to transform into *shape*, into *life*, the opinion, the feeling that may dwell within him, which, in its widest sense, we reckon to be essentially the grand problem of the poet. . . Everything has form, everything has visual existence; the poet's imagination *bodies forth* the forms of things unseen, his pen turns them to shape."² But we may as well quote directly from Shakespeare

"And as the imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination:
That, if it would but apprehend some joy
It comprehends some bringer of that joy."

¹Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Other Essays, p. 201. Criticism, according to Mr. W. C. Brownell, is the reverse of poetry: "Criticism, then, may not inexactly be described as the statement of the concrete in terms of the abstract." Atlantic Monthly, April, 1911, p. 548. This illuminates the relation between poetry and criticism and the value of the latter.

²Essays, "Goethe."

³Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V, Sc. 1.

So, according to Aristotle's theory, "A work of art reproduces its original, not as it is in itself, but as it appears to the senses. It addresses itself not to the abstract reason but to the sensibility; . . it is concerned with outward appearances; it employs illusions; its world is not that which is revealed by pure thought; it sees truth, but in its concrete manifestations, not as an abstract idea."¹

Poetry, then, like dreams, is concrete; its representation is made "under forms manifest to sense"; perhaps, also, chiefly and characteristically under forms manifest to the sense of sight. The words commonly employed in describing the poet's activity suggest this mainly visual character. He *portrays* and *pictures*; he *imagines*, "imaging," Dryden declares, "is in itself the very height and life of poetry"² To the poet, as to the dreamer, is ascribed the power of *vision*.

In dreams we have seen that some incident of the preceding day, which is free of associations, serves as a starting-point or point of crystallization. So the inspired poet often finds in some casual experience — a mountain daisy or a bright star or a region about Tintern — a centre around which his poetical conceptions may gather. Of his famous poem Wordsworth says, for example, "I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol." Of this feature of the poetic work, however, the best account is given by Goethe. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, he says that after trying suicide and giving it up he determined to live. "To do this with cheerfulness, however, I required to have some poetical task given me, wherein all that I had felt, thought, or dreamed on this weighty business might be spoken forth. With such view, I endeavored to collect the elements which for a year or two had been floating about in me, I represented to myself the circumstances which had most oppressed and afflicted me: but nothing of all this would take form; there was wanting an incident, a fable, in which I might embody it. All at once I hear

¹Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry, pp. 127, 153.

²The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic License.

tidings of Jerusalem's death, . . . in this instant the plan of Werther was invented: the whole shot together from all sides, and became a solid mass; as the water in a vessel, which already stood on the point of freezing, is by the slightest motion changed at once into firm ice."¹

We may suppose, however, from the analogy of the dream that this casual experience contributes only the final touch; and that the essential elements of poetry go back to deeper experience and more settled emotions. It would be difficult to show by direct evidence that poetry generally or often goes back to repressed experiences of childhood. Other considerations, however, suggest that in some respects the parallel holds again here. Poetry has the same freshness and youthfulness we have noted in dreams; it also has upon it the dew of morning and the light of the east. The poet's mind works in a primitive and, without disparagement, childlike way. The poet has the "wild wit, invention ever new," which Gray attributes to childhood.² The poet, like Walt Whitman, is "a man, yet by these tears a little boy again."³ "The moment the poetic mood is upon him all the trappings of the world with which for years he may have been clothing his soul — the world's knowingness, its cynicism, its self-seeking, its ambition—fall away, and the man becomes an inspired child again, with ears attuned to nothing but the whispers of those spirits of the Golden Age, who, according to Hesiod, haunt and bless this degenerate earth."⁴

Indeed the Golden Age, with its clear bright figures, and the Garden of Eden, with its first mortal pair, who were naked yet unashamed, and who had not yet eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, are in some sense doubtless only beautiful dreams, poetic visions, going back either to the childhood of those who first conceived them or more broadly to the childhood of the race. In these myths is seen most clearly the connection between dreams and poetry which we have been trying to trace. They are the dreams of

¹Carlyle's translation; *Essays*, "Goethe."

²"Eton College."

³"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." The whole poem is an excellent commentary on our text.

⁴T. Watts, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Poetry."

nations, bearing somewhat the same relation, as Dr. Abraham has shown,¹ to the dreams of the individual which folk poetry bears to the poetry of the individual poet. They are likewise the beginnings of our poetry, and furnish a clear explanation of the working of poetic genius. "The theory which has been applied to the Grecian mythology," says David Masson, "applies equally to the poetic genius in general. The essence of the mythical process, it is said, lay in this, that the earlier children of the earth having no abstract language, every thought of theirs, of whatever kind, and about whatever matter, was necessarily a new act of imagination, a new excursion into the ideal concrete. If they thought of the wind, they did not think of a fluid rushing about, but of a deity blowing from a cave; if they thought of virtue rewarded, they saw the idea in the shape of a visible transaction in some lone place, between beings human and divine." It is this primitive poetical faculty for which Wordsworth would return to paganism, that he may

"Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."

"And so," Masson continues, "with the poetical mode of thought to this day Every thought of the poets, about whatever subject, is transacted not mainly in propositional language, but for the most part in a kind of phantasmagoric or representative language, of imaginary scenes, objects, incidents, and circumstances."² Thus a very recent poet, Arnold, starting with the thought that Shakespeare stands far above other poets, transforms this thought into a picture, sees Shakespeare "o'ertopping knowledge," and then as a hill, which in turn is poetized into a mythical giant:

"For the loftiest hill
That to the stars uncrowns his majesty,
Planting his steadfast footsteps in the sea,
Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling-place,
Spares but the cloudy border of his base
To the foiled searching of humanity ""

¹K. Abraham, *Traum und Mythos*, pp. 37, 71.

²Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Other Essays, p. 229.

³"Shakespeare."

"The poet, then," as Professor Woodberry puts it, "seems to present the phenomenon of a highly developed mind working in a primitive way"¹

The mental faculty which produces poetry is akin to that already described as producing dreams. It might be called the phantasy, the fancy, or the imagination; but since these terms have been unfortunately extended and diverted to new meanings, it may best be called simply the image-making faculty. It will be worth while to consider this matter for a moment historically. The faculty before us is equivalent to the *φαντασία*, to which Aristotle attributes not only dreams but poetry. This Aristotle defines as "the movement which results upon an actual sensation." In other words, it is primarily the "after effect of a sensation, the continued presence of an impression after the object which exerted it has been withdrawn from actual experience."² It is notable that Hobbes, who on this point closely follows Aristotle, translates *φαντασία* by imagination: "For after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we saw it. And this is it the Latins call imagination, from the image made in seeing. . . . Imagination, therefore, is nothing but decaying sense. . . . This decaying sense, when we would express the thing itself . . . we call imagination, but when we would express the decay . . . we call it memory."³ Bacon employs the word imagination in the same way, and assigns to imagination poetry as its province.⁴ Addison, in his instructive papers in the *Spectator* on the pleasures of the imagination, uses the word, as might be expected, in the classical sense and makes imagination the mark of poetry. Whereas Aristotle, however, uses *phantasy* to include images derived from all the senses, Addison professes to restrict imagination — though he does not in fact entirely so restrict it — to images which "arise originally from sight." From their etymology both words, *phantasy* and *imagination*, apply properly to sight alone; Addison.

¹The Inspiration of Poetry, p. 13.

²E. Wallace, Aristotle's Psychology, p. lxxxvii.

³T. Hobbes, Works, ed. Molesworth, Vol. III, pp. 4-6.

⁴Works, ed. Spedding, Vol. IV, pp. 292, 406.

however, is wrong in formally so restricting this faculty, as he himself sees before he finishes his discussion. But "our sight," as Addison remarks, "is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses"; hence imagination is mainly visual. This, then, is the original use of the word *imagination* in English, as equivalent to the phantasy of Aristotle. Coleridge unfortunately did much to influence thought on the matter during the nineteenth century; his vague or unintelligible observations on the subject, with his attempted distinction between fancy and imagination, have served to obfuscate rather than to clarify it. Imagination has become as indefinite in meaning as poetry itself.

The original signification, however, still forms the core of its meaning, and the best way to secure definiteness of thought is to return to it. The poetic imagination is essentially equivalent to the image-making faculty mentioned above. This faculty, as has been said, lies between sense and intellect. Its images are derived originally from sensations; it in turn furnishes material for thought. In ordinary waking activity it is in a broad sense kept true to reality, reproducing images as they have been derived from the senses, or combining these in a manner approved by the judgment for the practical ends of action. Under other conditions, however,—in abstraction, in sleep, in moments of poetical production, when senses and conscious intellect are in abeyance — then this faculty is freed from responsibility to reality, and is put at the service of the desires. It does not reproduce reality, it produces fiction. Under proper conditions it produces what we call poetry.

In the prose man, in Benjamin Franklin, for example, the imaging faculty works in a prosaic way. It reproduces images truthfully or combines them for practical purposes, under the supervision of the judgment. In the poet, in Bunyan or Shelley, it is constantly and readily placed at the service of the desires or aspirations, producing fiction or poetry. It is seen in its extreme poetical operation in a man like Blake, who easily lost hold on reality, who became habitually a dreamer, visionary, or poet. "I assert for myself," says Blake, "that I do not behold the outward creation, and that it is to me hindrance and not action.

‘What,’ it will be questioned, ‘when the sun rises, do you not see a round disc of fire something like a guinea?’ Oh! no, no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!’ I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, and not with it.”¹

“We are led to believe a lie
When we see with, not through the eye.”

This is the difference between the proseman and the poet. The former sees with the eye the world as it is. The latter sees through the eye — the same organ differently employed — the world as he would wish it to be; — this is what we mean by “second sight.” The poet also sees truth, but of a different and higher kind. “What the imagination seizes as beauty,” says Keats, “must be truth, whether it existed before or not. . . The imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream; he awoke and found it truth.”²

From what has just been said of the imaging faculty, together with what has been said above of poetical creation, we may form a new, or at least more definite, conception of that “creative imagination” which is ordinarily ascribed to the poet. This expression, as employed in current criticism, is a vague one, covering — perhaps properly for a complete description — other activities besides the comparatively definite one we have been considering here. We have been dealing with the core of the matter, however, and when we come to understand the “dream-power” of the poet, as Emerson calls it,³ the creative imagination will have lost most of its mystery. The poet is a creator because, like the dreamer, he creates in an ideal world according to our desires what is wanting in the divinely created world of reality. He pictures it through a faculty which he has in common with the dreamer. That the operation of this faculty in the

¹A Vision of Judgment. Cf. Shakespeare’s “Love looks not with the eye, but with the mind.” The lover, as Plato believed, is a kind of poet; cf. p. 119, below.

²Letters, ed. Forman, 1895, pp. 52, 53.

³“Stand and strive” — thus Emerson apostrophizes the poet — “until, at last, rage draw out of thee that dream-power, which every night shows thee is thine own.” Essays, “The Poet.”

dreamer is fairly well understood suggests that its operation in the poet is not beyond our comprehension. Its poetical operation is perhaps difficult of analysis, because, like that of the dreamer, it is an unconscious operation and cannot be readily observed. Our parallel, however, suggests obvious lines of investigation which may lead to a definite comprehension of the creative imagination, as it works not only in dreams but in poetry.

It may be objected that the explanation of poetry offered in the preceding pages is quite theoretical, formed without sufficient regard for actual poetry; that in any given poem there is much which is not at all referable to the kind of operation that I have been describing; indeed, that there are many poems which show no trace of this operation and bear no apparent relation to it. In considering this objection the reader will in the first place kindly keep in mind what has already been stated,—namely, that this explanation does not apply to all that goes under the name of poetry, but only to the poetry of primary inspiration. He will remember also that even the inspired poet is not always inspired. He is inspired only in those poems or parts of poems that are most vital and characteristic; elsewhere he is himself only copying the forms of inspiration. He writes perhaps through a long poem in one verse-form; this uniformity tends to conceal the fact that the different parts of the poem are quite different in their nature and inspiration. Some parts are written with vision; they come from the deep unconscious sources that have been referred to. Others are written with the conscious mind; these are the work of the skilful artificer, not of the true poet. The latter parts may contain material of any sort — the actual history and description of Scott or the philosophy which we could so ill spare from Shakespeare — whatever the writer may make congruous with his inspired portions and with his verse-form. By no means all of any poem, therefore, will be poetry in the sense in which we are using the term. One is reminded of Coleridge's dictum that "a poem of any length neither can be nor ought to be all poetry," and of Poe's that a long poem is a contradiction in terms.

A distinction must be made between the poetry origi-

nally formed in the mind of the poet and the poem as it is finally committed to writing. The former is a vision, like a dream of brief duration, coming in the moments of rapture; the latter is the product of extended labor. "A true work of art," says Carlyle, "requires to be fused in the mind of its creator, and, as it were, poured forth (from his imagination, though not from his pen) at one simultaneous gush."¹ Shelley expresses much the same thought: "The toil and delay recommended by critics can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments and an artificial connection of the spaces between their suggestions by the intertexture of conventional expressions — a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself; for Milton conceived the *Paradise Lost* as a whole before he executed it in portions."²

The relation between the poetic vision and the literary product will be further explained by another reference to the dream theory. The poetic vision is perhaps subjected to a process similar to that described as taking place in dreams under the name of Secondary Elaboration.³ This is due to the action of the censor and arises "from the activity, not of the underlying dream thoughts, but of the more conscious mental processes. . . . When a dream is apprehended in consciousness [that is, recollected on waking], it is treated in the same way as any other perceptive content, and is therefore not accepted in its unaltered state, but is assimilated to pre-existing conceptions. It is thus to a certain extent remodeled so as to bring it, so far as is possible, into harmony with the other conscious mental processes."⁴ So when the poet brings his vision out of the region of inspiration into the everyday world, when he comes consciously to recollect and record it, he doubtless inevitably modifies it to bring it into harmony with his ordinary waking thought. When, for example, Shelley recorded his vision in what Trelawny describes as a "frightful scrawl," even in this scrawl made almost in the moment of rapture, he doubtless

¹Essays, "Richter."

²Defense of Poetry, ed. Cook, p. 39.

³Die Traumdeutung, VI (h).

⁴E. Jones, *American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. XXI, p. 297

lost something of his original inspiration. And when the next morning — to use his own words — he made from this rude sketch a finished drawing, he doubtless lost still more. He had to find words for his vision in the language of this world, he had to mould it in a conventional metrical form, he had to give it local habitation in a world of prose. There was more poetry in Shelley's heart than could find expression in the finished lyric. "The most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world," says Shelley himself, "is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet."¹ Truly—to paraphrase Emerson—it is in the soul that poetry exists, and our poems are poor, far-behind imitations. At best parts of them are faintly animated by the authentic poetical inspiration.

IV

We must now return to those "desires of the mind," as Bacon calls them, which supply the motives to poetical activity. Every man may be regarded as made up of those desires which form his native and basic character — of those "cravings," to use Nietzsche's phrase, which "constitute his being."² These are constantly changing, some quickly passing, others perhaps long remaining; but at any moment each man has a certain number of cravings, which, as Nietzsche says, call for sustenance; he has a certain number of demands upon life which he wishes to have satisfied in his experience. These demands are of all sorts from the personal and immediate bodily desires, like those for food and drink, to the most elevated aspirations — like the one, for example, which Matthew Arnold insisted upon, that reason and the will of God shall prevail. The main desires are those which serve the preservation of life and the propagation of the species. Perhaps about these all the others gather; the others are these great main desires extended, specialized, and diffused. Whatever their nature, higher or lower, their working is the same for our purposes if a man desires them with heart and soul. These desires form his character, they furnish the motive energy for his life. They

¹Defense of Poetry, ed. Cook, p. 39.

²The Dawn of Day, p. 116.

set in motion his activities, these being calculated to secure, if possible, the appropriate gratification.

Our comfort and happiness, we may presume, comes from such gratification. That man would be completely happy whose desires naturally aroused the proper activities, and whose activities successfully attained their end in gratification, between whose desires and experience there was perfect correspondence. On the other hand, a man would be entirely comfortable in mind and body if his desires could be eradicated; he might approach happiness by eliminating his desires, for, as Carlyle observes, you get the same result either by increasing the dividend or by decreasing the divisor. Complete happiness, however, is denied in both these directions, not even the most fortunate man finds all his desires gratified; and, on the other hand, by no sort of stoicism can man reduce his demands on life to the point of vanishing. Thus every man inevitably has his desires, some of which must be satisfied at the peril of his life, others of which are only a little less imperative, all of which are insistent.

Of the whole number of desires some are gratified, and thus ended, others, in seeking or contemplating gratification, encounter obstacles, giving rise to disappointment, hunger, and pain of heart.

These obstacles arise in outside circumstances in various ways. A man may desire something, act in order to obtain it, and find it literally snatched away from him by another. He may see that gratification is impossible and not act at all; the obstacle in this case arises in his own mind antecedent to action. He may wish for something that is physically impossible to obtain — to add a cubit to his stature or to bring back his departed friend. More often, however, he meets not a physical but, we may say, a moral obstacle. He wishes for something which he does not think it right, which he knows that others will not think it right, that he should try to obtain. He must consider appearances, custom, moral obligations, laws human and divine. Thus a man may be prevented from going to church in tennis flannels, or proclaiming his real opinion on trial marriages, or bearing false witness against his neighbor, though he may

have the strongest impulse toward any of these things. The obstacle is not actual and physical; it exists only in his own mind in his moral scruples; it none the less prevents the satisfaction of his desire.

Thus there arises a conflict between the individual's impulse and his regard for the authority of what in sociology is called the herd. Life sometimes seems a psychic war between man and society, with battles waged on the field of the mind,—that is, in the mind of the single individual,—blows, even death blows, being given upon this field. The conflict runs through life. Conduct is the result of a series of compromises or adjustments between impulse on the one hand and authority, duty, or conscience, on the other. In dress, for example, this is symbolized; in dress we express our own taste within the limits of fashion. In our writing we give utterance to our own thought and feeling in accordance with the traditions and usages of language in the prosaic and poetic styles. In manners we act as we like, so far as our breeding or training will allow. In moral matters we follow the devices and desires of our own hearts, so far as our moral obligations will permit. There is everywhere this conflict between impulse and authority, resulting in compromises more or less satisfactory. The *Mill on the Floss* is a study of such a conflict, in which the individual, the environment, and the reaction of one upon the other, with its results, are put before us by a master.

Our desires are primary and innate, our regard for outside opinion acquired. The savage is a man of ungoverned passions; civilization is a long training in self-government; the civilized man has come to feel the moral obligations sensitively and to respond to them by second nature. This response, however, never becomes better than second nature; our first nature being always to follow our own desires. In the same way the child is morally still in the savage state. He is born with his own native character, completely an individual. He expresses himself naturally and lawlessly in acts and speech. He satisfies his desires selfishly, eating and sleeping, and as he grows older, loving his mother who feeds and cares for him—in this way first learning what love is. He has no altruism, frankly disliking his rivals,

perhaps his brothers, who interfere with him,— having no compunction, as investigation has shown, in wishing them removed by death. Soon, however, he begins to feel the force of authority, and to learn from parents and playmates the meaning of duty, obligation, and manners. “Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy,” and “the years bring the inevitable yoke.” His education is a long training in the government of the impulses, in repression,— a conservative and conventionalizing process undertaken by society in its own interest. Youth is subdued by age until youth becomes age; the young man becomes not merely an individual, but a member of society, helping in turn to impose the authority of society upon others. Thus the child, we may say, the moment he is born begins to die. The spirit first animates the mortal clay and then is quenched by it. For the spirit of life is in these impulses, and the hand of authority is the hand of death. The dying is life-long, however; it is, as we have seen, a protracted conflict:

“Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity
Until death tramples it to fragments.”¹

In waking hours, in hours of attention and action, man feels his connection and responsibility; he feels the full weight of authority. In sleep, in abstraction, in solitude, he feels this weight fall away; he becomes an individual; he begins to dream. As dreamer and poet he returns, as we have seen, to childhood and the individual life,— to

“Those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day
Are yet the master light of all our seeing.”²

This is a truth which all of us except the poets have forgotten — that life and vision and poetry, which belong to us all until we die, belong in fullest measure to childhood. We see it symbolized in the early religious paintings of the holy child in his mother’s arms, his head surrounded by

¹Shelley, “Adonais.”

²Wordsworth, “Intimations of Immortality.”

the halo, with the inscription, "I am the light of the world."
We read it in the quaint poems of Vaughan who, shining in his angel-infancy,

"Felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness."

We read it everywhere in Wordsworth, above all, in the wonderful Ode, which is its best exposition:

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison house begin to close
Upon the growing boy
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth who daily further from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.

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"Thou whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted forever by the eternal mind,—
Mighty prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little child, yet glorious in the might
Of Heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,

And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!"¹

The true poet is born, not made. The acquirements which are so much in demand for practical and social ends come by education; the impulses which are the life of genius, especially of the poetic genius, are innate, a heritage through childhood. The possession of these in a marked degree and quality, which distinguishes those we call specially poets, comes as a gift from nature.

The desires of mankind furnish the energy which moves the world and makes for progress. In each man they promote his activities and lead to accomplishment, inspiring him to find a way to this and as a means to invent the useful arts. "Magister artis ingenique largitor venter."² Necessity is the mother of invention — not only in the useful arts but in the fine arts also. It is these desires, as has been said, which inspire dreams by night and by day, including the dreams of the poet. Not finding outlet in activity and denied actual gratification they provide for themselves a fictional gratification, creating through the imagination what is wanting in reality. They create an ideal world, parallel with, but above and beyond that of reality; "a purified form of reality," according to Aristotle, "disengaged from accident, and freed from conditions which thwart its development";³ — an ideal world, which, we may imagine, through some pre-established harmony between mind and nature, the world of reality tends to approach and grow into. Those arts in which this dream power is at work we call the fine arts; they have what we call ideal beauty, and give us a pleasure of gratification.

These desires do not, however, express themselves in dreams or poetry unhampered — except, we may imagine, in children. They meet that opposing force of authority which gives rise to the censor of the dream theory and to the cor-

¹Compare Wordsworth, "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty," IV, with its reference to dreams; "Personal Talk;" "Prelude," Book II; Shelley, "A Lament"; Hood, "I Remember"; Gray, "Eton College"; Longfellow, "The Hanging of the Crane."

²Persius, Prologue, I, 10.

³Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry, p. 150.

responding regulative, controlling, and disintegrating force which is at work in the production of poetry. Here again life animates the mortal clay and is in turn quenched by it. The poetic spirit finds its incarnation and partial expression in the fictions and conventional forms which we call poetry. In poetry the word is made flesh.

We have been considering mainly the individual poet. We may perhaps regard man as a microcosm of mankind, and the larger life of mankind as the resultant from the same conflict of opposing forces,—between the individual and society, between men taken separately and men taken together as a unit. We may perhaps regard imaginative literature as a whole — the literature, for example, of a period or a nation — as determined by these same opposing forces.

The terms *classicism* and *romanticism* have been common in literary history and criticism. They have been often abused and often used vaguely. Every student of literary history, however, knows that they relate to actualities, that they serve to name, if not to explain, certain observed facts and tendencies in literature. The difficulty is not with the terms, but with the definition or explanation of them. Accounts of the so-called “romantic movement,” for example, give instances and characteristics which everyone feels to be somehow “romantic” and related, but do not amount to satisfactory explanations, because they do not unify the phenomena by bringing them under a cause or principle. The principles which best explain romanticism and classicism are well stated in two words by Walter Pater, as “the principles of liberty, and authority, respectively.”¹ These principles, Pater says, are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. “However falsely those two tendencies may be opposed by the critics, or exaggerated by artists themselves, they are tendencies really at work at all times in art, molding it, with the balance sometimes a little on one side, sometimes a little on the other, generating, respectively, as the balance inclines on this side or that, two principles, two traditions, in art and in literature.”¹ Literature, in other words, is the result of a conflict between

¹Appreciations, “Postscript.”

the individual impulse, the life-giving and progressive principle, on the one hand, and the power of authority, the controlling and conservative principle, on the other. Both of these forces are always at work, but according as one or the other has in any period the upper hand, we call that period romantic or classical.

The literature of England and generally of Northern Europe is romantic; that is, in the northern literature the vital impulse has always more than held its own against the force of authority. The conflict, however, has been strenuous. The northern genius expressed itself characteristically in the Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages. We can understand this expression if we think of these northern peoples as they first appeared in history, full of youth and life and energy, with strong bodies and strong emotions; if we think of them subjected, in a comparatively brief time, through their introduction to civilization and Christianity, to the control of older laws and the ordinances of a religion which placed the main emphasis on the mortification of the flesh. Their pent energy expressed itself in this architecture, the product of great genius under unwonted pressure; it was forced up into the points and pinnacles, broken into the colors of the windows, tortured into the grotesque forms and monstrous figures of the decorations. It subjected itself to form — to a form, however, which it seems to tolerate uneasily, which it threatens to throw off in order to secure its liberty. This is characteristic of the northern art and literature, which retain a wildness, grotesqueness, and freedom to the present day.

We may be sure that the human creative energy, like energy in every other form, comes not constantly but intermittently, or in waves,— waves century long, however, so that we can look back over only a small number of these in our literary history. The Elizabethan period felt such an influx of energy. It was a time of individualism, of youth, of progress, and therefore, as we should expect, a time of initiative, activity, curiosity, invention, imagination. "To vent the feelings, to satisfy the heart and eyes, to set free boldly on all the roads of existence the pack of appetites and instincts, this," says Taine, "was the craving which

the manners of the time betrayed."¹ In the world of action it produced men like John Smith, a kind of great boy, as fresh, active, and adventurous as Ulysses. In the world of letters it produced men like Christopher Marlowe, the type of genius fresh and uncontrolled,—a man who

“Had in him those brave translunary things
That the first poets had.”²

Its writers were full of passion, originality, and imagination; they were impatient of form as form, having a natural rather than a traditional art, as artists they were naive, even boyish, playing and experimenting with literary forms and with language, fond of the verbal conceits and jingles that boys delight in. Shakespeare is a good representative of this remarkable time.

While Shakespeare lived, however, the wave began to recede, and in the Jacobean writers passion grew pale and imagination feeble. The force of authority asserted itself. Ben Jonson and his classical followers were not satisfied with Shakespeare's natural art, to them Shakespeare wanted art. “*Sufflaminandus erat*,” said Jonson,³ — “he ought to have had the brakes put on him”—and this sums up the attitude of authority toward Shakespeare and its hostility to the romantic spirit. Dryden's expression, however, may be added. Representing the adult and Frenchified criticism of the Restoration, with the air of a man who has grown and traveled, he says of the boyish exuberance of the Elizabethans — “Their wit was not that of gentlemen,” and “it frequently descended to clenches.”

The classical critics found standards for judging the Elizabethans where they are usually found — in the past. The effort of authority is always to bind the present by the past. Modern writers, it should be noted, may return to the classics for two purposes,—some, like Marlowe and Keats, to stand “up to the chin in the Pierian flood,” and to

¹History of English Literature, Book III, Chap. I, Sec. 3.

²Drayton, “To H. Reynolds.”

³Jonson, Timber, and Dryden, Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age. Both Jonson and Dryden, in speaking of Shakespeare, more often acknowledge their kinship and admiration; but then they are not speaking with the voice of authority.

live with those first poets who "are yet the fountain light of all our day"; others, like Jonson and Pope, to find laws and precedents. The former go generally to Homer and the Greeks, the latter to the Latin poets, particularly to Horace. The main characteristic of the writers in our so-called classical period was not that they returned to the classics, or that their work is marked by traits conspicuous in the classics, but that they made authority the guide of life and sought authority in Homer and Virgil, Aristotle and Horace.

"Hear how learned Greece her useful rules indites,
When to repress, and when indulge our flights.

"Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy nature is to copy them."¹

The period from the Restoration to the end of the eighteenth century is best explained by this key idea. It was social, frowning upon individuality — a time of rigid conventionalism, when one man was expected to be like another in dress, manners, language, and style. It was sophisticated and cynical,— as if age had come upon it since the time of Shakespeare,— "a decrepit, death-sick era," Carlyle calls the latter part of it. It was reflective and critical rather than progressive and creative. It was strong in its common sense, which recognizes the demands of society. In literature it was an age of prose and reason; it produced satires and novels; it perfected the heroic couplet. It produced men like Pope and Chesterfield and Franklin, sane men, who saw no visions and had no illusions. A very valuable period this no doubt was too; not to be underestimated, but rather to be seen for what it is; for, if man cannot live by bread alone, in this world at any rate bread is necessary; man must think as well as dream; art is necessary as well as inspiration, and we may suppose the eighteenth century well spent in criticism and reflection.

The nineteenth century, however, broke the bonds of authority and reasserted the power of the individual. Rousseau sounded the new note in the first page of his *Confessions*: "I am not made like any one else, I have ever known; yet

¹Pope, "Essay on Criticism."

if I am not better, at least I am different." These words introduce another era of creative energy:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive;
But to be young was very heaven."¹

We need not stop to characterize this "romantic movement," with its rejuvenation of English life and literature, except to note that one of its traits was a strain of melancholy, morbidity, and madness, which hardly finds its parallel in the earlier romantic era. The author of *Hamlet* must have sounded the gloomy depths of the human mind, but he always kept up appearances. The abandonment of Rousseau, of Werther and René and Childe Harold, is new in the nineteenth century. There is an apparent difference in mental constitution between the men of letters of this period and those of the eighteenth century. The latter — Addison, Steele, Pope, Fielding, Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke — whatever their bodily infirmities, were pre-eminently sane in mind. Even Swift, whose insanity was probably due to physical causes, could look at life clearly. The romantic writers, with the exception of Scott, — Chatterton, Cowper, and Blake, Wordsworth,² Coleridge, and Southey; Byron, Shelley, and Keats; Hazlitt, Lamb, and De Quincey — all these were in some way mentally eccentric or abnormal. For one reason or another they would have seemed "strange" to a belated observer from the polite and sensible eighteenth century. It would seem — if a conclusion can be drawn from evidence like this — that something in the romantic temper, with its individualism, its passion, its fondness for solitude and hatred of society, were conducive to mental aberration. Perhaps an explanation for this will be found in the following pages.

We have seen that life may be regarded as a conflict between the individual and society; that poetry has its origin in a conflict between the poet's egoistic desires or impulses on the one hand and his regard for what we have called authority on the other; that, to some extent at least,

¹Wordsworth, *Prelude*, Book XI.

²Some readers may object to the inclusion of Wordsworth here, and I have no objection to omission.

literature may be explained as resultant from a similar conflict between similar opposing forces. In this same conflict will perhaps be found the explanation of another peculiarity of poetic production which we have not yet considered. Let us see.

V

We shall have to return again to the desires of the mind. Satisfied desires are ended. Unsatisfied desires give rise to feelings of *dissatisfaction*, to unpleasant or painful sensations, to some degree of emotional disturbance,—if this disturbance is severe, to what we call passion. This is what we have in mind when we say colloquially that we are passionately fond of a thing, or simply that we have a passion for it.¹ The word passion is commonly applied to one of our main or fundamental desires, the sexual one, and only when satisfaction of this desire is deferred; the satisfied lover is no longer passionate; it is only the lover who is separated from his mistress who is consumed by passion. It may be thought that the passion of love is mainly pleasurable but observation will probably show, as a consideration of its nature will suggest, that its main element is one of dissatisfaction and unpleasurable.² As this is the one of our fundamental desires which most often conflicts with external authority, in some one of its forms — as this desire is most often subject to repression—it probably is most often relieved in dreams and poetry.³ A great part of imaginative literature — not merely love poems and tales, but much which on its face does not relate to this subject — is probably a sublimated expression of the sexual desire. This throws light also on the analogy, which is suggested by language and by other evidence, between actual or physiological

¹The reason why we say we are “mad” or “crazy” about a thing will appear in a moment.

²Cf. Freud, *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory*, translated by A. A. Brill, p. 60.

³This statement, as far as it concerns dreams and neurotic manifestations, is supported by the investigations of Dr. Freud. Dr. Freud has been blamed for the preoccupation of his psychology with the sexual. It may be noted that imaginative literature is preoccupied with the same subject, particularly plays and novels.

creation and imaginative creation, this analogy is not fanciful.¹

The unsatisfied lover proverbially breaks out in verse, taking refuge in this indirect expression and gratification when others more actual are denied him. The lover on the authority of Shakespeare is one of those who are of imagination all compact. According to Shakespeare, also, unsatisfied love leads to madness. Romeo is thought next door to it. "Why, Romeo, art thou mad?" Benvolio asks him, and Mercutio calls, "Romeo! humours! madman! passion! lover!" Hamlet is in love, and thought by Polonius, who is doubtless not entirely wrong, to be "from his reason fall'n thereon." Hamlet, by the way, also has "bad dreams." Ophelia goes mad for love

"O heavens! is't possible, a young maid's wits
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?
Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine,
It sends some precious instance of itself
After the thing it loves."

Ophelia's songs, moreover, are the appropriate expression of her thwarted love and consequent madness — a natural poetry, well illustrating, though they are only those of a *dramatis persona*, what we have said of the origin of poetry.²

Ophelia illustrates also some earlier lines of Shakespeare, for she is at once lunatic, lover, and poet.

"Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends;
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact."

There is much meaning condensed in the celebrated passage in which these lines occur, and it may be reperused with

¹See the section on this subject in Ribot, *L'Imagination Créatrice*, p. 62.

²It may be urged that, as Mrs. Jameson suggests, Ophelia is here recalling snatches of old ballads heard in infancy; but the expression is at any rate a poetic one, in the sense of this discussion; and, being doubtless in part at least extempore, it represents just that fusion of elements from childhood and recent experience which we have found to be characteristic of the poetic expression in general.

³*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act. V, Sc. 1.

profit by anyone who has followed this discussion thus far.¹ The point in it to our present purpose is the common character which Shakespeare attributes to the lover,—or may we say generally the man unsatisfied?—the madman, and the poet.

Not every man who wants gratification, of course, is mad in the ordinary sense of the term. The fact is only this—that the conflict we have described between the desires and fact or authority produces friction, heat, emotional disturbance, which tends to impede and incapacitate “cool reason,”—which, if carried far enough, will completely overthrow it and end in irrationality and madness. The mental condition of ecstasy may even be brought on artificially—as it was by St. Simon and others—through fasting, sexual abstinence, and isolation. Now the conflict between desire and fact or authority is characteristic of the poet, and in the poet also it produces friction, emotional disturbance, a suspension, even an unbalancing of the reason—what we call the poetic madness.

Light is thrown on this subject by recent investigations in mental pathology. Dr. Freud and others have found that many cases of psychoneurosis, ranging from slight mental disturbances to what would amount to legal insanity, are due to the noxious effects of repressed material in the mind. In these cases the patient has at some time, perhaps even in childhood, felt certain strong desires, he has found these for some reason incompatible with the facts of life, and has consequently repressed them. They are thus driven back into unconsciousness; the patient himself has no knowledge of them. They continue operative, however, causing various neurotic symptoms—day dreams, violent hallucinations, involuntary speeches and actions—which provide for them, so to speak, a symbolic fictional gratification.² For example, the speeches and actions of the patient, through a species of

¹It is notable that this passage occurs in the most poetical of Shakespeare's dramas—one which he entitled a dream, and which has many dream qualities. One might imagine that his attention had been called to the “dream power” by his own mental experiences, and that he pondered the subject which we are trying to discuss here.

²See K. Abraham, *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen*, Vol. II, “Über hysterische Traumzustände.”

"displacement" or transference, one thing standing for or symbolizing another through obscure associations, become an unusual or abnormal outlet for unconscious impulses, to which on their face they seem in no way related. Thus nervous or hysterical manifestations which once seemed meaningless and mysterious are now traced to their definite origin in the patient's mental processes. If these unconscious desires are brought to light, rationalized, and given proper expression their noxious influence ceases and the strange symptoms disappear; and this fact has supplied a cure of practical value in such cases. The repressed material forms a "painful and disturbing element in the organism," to use the phrase employed by Professor Butcher in describing the Aristotelian *katharsis*, and the cure consists in the "elimination of alien matter." Now to apply this to the subject in hand — here is a mental derangement or madness, resulting from what may be called mental friction, produced by the conflict between desires and obligations. The poetic madness is analogous, arising in the same conflict, and poetry is in some respects analogous to the neurotic symptoms noted above. Ophelia's songs will perhaps again serve to bridge for the reader's mind the gap between the two: we may suppose these songs to be not only natural poetry, as we have seen, but the manifestation of a neurosis.

So, if, as Keble says, "to innumerable persons poetry acts as a safety-valve, tending to preserve them from mental disease," it is from a disease of this sort, from what would be called in modern pathology a neurosis. As the reader will remember that dreams have a similar function, it is not remarkable that Dr. Freud has found that the dreams of his neurotic patients deal largely with the same subject-matter which gives rise to their neurotic symptoms. So much is this true that the patient's dreams supply one of the means regularly employed in discovering the hidden causes of the disease. It is not strange, moreover, that poets should be, as we have seen, great dreamers, since their mental condition is one approaching a neurosis.

This will help to explain recent works, like those of Dr Nordau and Lombroso, which attempt to show that poets are often "degenerates," and the ease with which they

supply evidence lending apparent support to their theories. Such evidence can be found in the lives of many poets. These poets are not, however, degenerates;¹ they are not even necessarily to be called abnormal or diseased. The mental sanity of the poet has been often questioned. Lamb, in a well-known essay, defends the "sanity of true genius."² Heine suggests the opposite view: "Oder ist die Poesie vielleicht eine Krankheit des Menschen, wie die Perle eigentlich nur der Krankheitsstoff ist, woran das arme Austertier leidet."³ It is, however, alike vain and unscientific to discuss the question whether poets are mentally diseased or not, the line between mental health and disease being a vague or imaginary one, and the poet at most only showing in greater degree traits which are common to all men, all men being dreamers, poets, and neurotics in some measure. We can only say that poets are inevitably subject to mental disturbance, which may go so far as to make them "peculiar" or incapable of discharging the ordinary duties of society.

Let us return to the emotional disturbance regularly incident to the production of poetry — to the classical poetic madness. This word must apply to various kinds of disturbance,— at least to the same disturbance in very varying degrees. With Sir Walter Scott we may suppose madness to have amounted only to a genial glow, perhaps for the reason that his ruling passion was of a mild kind, of long duration, and, so to speak, diffused. For, as Keble observes, "the mind has its $\eta\theta\eta$ as well as its $\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\eta$, — its permanent tastes, habits, inclinations, which, when directly checked, are as capable of relief by poetical expression as the more hidden and violent emotions."⁴ With a poet like Shelley the madness may rise to a higher but temporary disturbance — a rapture or even a fine frenzy. With Coleridge, or De Quincey, or Poe, it may take peculiar forms because complicated with the effects of alcohol or opium, resorted to perhaps for alleviation, the poetic product in these cases having

¹See the argument in Hirsch, *Genius and Degeneration*.

²*Essays of Elia*, "The Sanity of True Genius."

³*Die Romantische Schule*, II, iv.

⁴*The British Critic*, Vol. XXIV, p. 439

quite unusual coloring. With Blake it may be an almost uninterrupted and life-long ecstasy, to his friends indistinguishable from insanity. Finally, it may lead to, or at least be associated with, actual madness, as, perhaps, in Cowper or de Maupassant. In the cases of Ben Jonson, Swift, and Southey, who were attacked by insanity, we cannot be sure what connection, if any, there was between the poetic faculty and the mental derangement. In Lamb we feel perhaps that the dream power, the poetic madness, and the insanity were somehow closely connected. Perhaps an average or typical case would be that of Byron, who says in *Childe Harold*

"I have thought
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,
In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame."

Or, as he says in his letter, after speaking of this poem as his favorite: "I was half mad during the time of its composition, between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love unextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies."¹ We do not know, however, definitely what Byron means by this half madness.

The madness is different in character and degree in different poets; but, in some sense and in some degree, the true poet will always be mad. We have it on the authority of a long line of poets and critics, reaching back to the oldest. The *locus classicus* occurs in the well-known passage in the *Phædrus*, in which Socrates is made to divide madness into four kinds.² Of these the first and the fourth belong to the prophet and the lover. The second is less familiar to us, it is the madness which "purges away ancient wrath," emotional excitement being used, apparently in the way described by Aristotle, to drive out harmful emotional disturbances, by a homeopathic and cathartic method, restorative of mental sanity.³ "He who has part in this gift," says Plato, "and is truly possessed and duly out of his mind, is by the use of purifications and mysteries made

¹*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III, vii; Letter to Moore, Jan. 28, 1817.

²Jowett's Translation, Vol. I, p. 450; cf. *Ion*, Vol. I, p. 502.

³Cf. p. 45, note 5.

whole and exempt from evil." Then comes the poetic madness. "The third kind is the madness of those who are possessed of the Muses; which taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art — he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman."

Aristotle's expressions on this subject are in substantial agreement with Plato's, though they introduce a new element. Aristotle also believes poetry to be "a thing inspired."¹ In the *Poetics*, however, he says it "implies either a strain of madness or a happy gift of nature." That is, he divides poets into two classes, the *ἐκστατικοί* and the *εὐπλαστοί* — on which Keble bases his distinction between the poets of primary and the poets of secondary inspiration. Just as an actor can get his effect, either by abandoning himself and living through all the feelings of the character he represents, or, on the other hand, by a cool and deliberate mimicry; so the poet must be either "filled with fury, rapt, inspired," or he must be capable, by a flexible assumption through conscious art, of writing as if he were inspired. Shelley was a poet of primary inspiration. Dryden, on the other hand, "had in perfection the *εὐφυνία*, the versatility and power of transforming himself into the resemblance of real sentiment, which the great philosopher has set down as one of the natural qualifications for poetry, but he wanted the other and more genuine spring of the art — *τὸ μανικόν* — the enthusiasm, the passionate devotion to some one class of objects or train of thought."² Aristotle thus agrees with Plato except that, to cover the facts as he finds them, he broadens his conception of poetry to include that of secondary as well as that of primary inspiration — just as a critic of the whole body of our poetry would have to do to-day. Aristotle's expression, however, adds nothing for

¹Rhetoric, III, 7; *Poetics*, XVII, 2.

²British Critic, Vol. XXIV, p. 438.

our purpose; as has been said, we are concerned only with the *εκστατικοί*; when they are explained the mysteries of poetry will have been cleared up.

Other expressions to the same effect are common in classical writers, and doubtless go back to these passages in Plato and Aristotle. "Poetam bonum neminem," says Cicero, giving as authorities Plato and Democritus, "sine inflammatione animorum existere posse, et sine quodam afflatu quasi furoris."¹ Plutarch explains verse as arising from this madness: "But above all, the ravishment of the spirit or that divine inspiration which is called *enthusiasmus*, casteth body, mind, voice, and all far beyond the ordinary habit; which is the cause that the furious raging priests of Bacchus . . . use rime and meeter; those also who by a prophetic spirit give answer by oracle, deliver the same in verse; and few persons shall a man see starke mad, but among their raving speeches they sing or say some verses."² Seneca attributes to Aristotle the saying, "Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiæ fuit."³

The English poets in turn have taken the idea from the classics. Ben Jonson quotes it from Seneca, Plato, and Aristotle;⁴ and Dryden translates from Seneca, "Great wits are sure to madness near allied."⁵ Pope, probably on classical authority, attributes to Spleen "the hysteric or poetic fit."⁶ It is unnecessary, however, to suppose that the idea is native only to the classics. Our old word *wood* or *wode*, meaning mad, is believed to be etymologically connected with *wod*, a song, and with the Latin *vates*, a seer or poet,— suggesting that recognition of the poetic madness is very widespread and older than Plato. So when Drayton writes of Marlowe,

"For that fine madness still he did retain
Which rightly should possess the poet's brain,"⁷

and when Shakespeare speaks of the "poet's eye in a fine

¹De Oratore, II, 46; cf. De Natura Deorum, II, 66.

²Morals, Symposiacs, i, 5. Holland's translation.

³De Tranquillitate Animi, XV, 16.

⁴Timber, ed. Schelling, p. 75.

⁵Absalom and Achitophel, I, 163-164.

⁶The Rape of the Lock, IV, 60.

⁷"To H. Reynolds."

frenzy rolling," these writers are not necessarily indebted to Plato for the idea. Indeed Shakespeare seems to have thought most independently and deeply of all on this subject, for the passage in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, taken with lines of similar import in other plays, gives a clue to the whole truth in the matter.¹

Wordsworth's lines in *The Prelude* bear on this, as upon other matters we have been considering:

"Some called it madness—so indeed it was
If childlike fruitfulness in passing joy,
If steady moods of thoughtfulness matured
To inspiration, sort with such a name;
If prophecy be madness; if things viewed
By poets of old time, and higher up
By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,
May in these tutored days no more be seen
With undisordered sight."²

The poet's madness is not, as so many have thought, a sign of weakness, abnormality, or degeneration, but rather of power. As Professor Woodberry remarks, it "denotes nothing abnormal, but is rather an unusually perfect illustration of the normal action of emotion in a pure form."³ So Emerson, seeing in such madness the only escape from American materialism and conformity, exclaims: "O Celestial Bacchus! drive them mad,—this multitude of vagabonds, hungry for eloquence, hungry for poetry, starving for symbols, perishing for want of electricity to vitalize this too much pasture, and in the long delay indemnifying themselves with the false wine of alcohol, of politics, and of money." Nietzsche, likewise, imagines the productive minds of all ages seeking madness, which he recognizes as arising from the conflict of genius with the "morality of customs": "Oh, ye powers in heaven above, grant me madness! Madness that I may at least have faith in my own self! . . . Doubt is devouring me; I have slain the law, and the law haunts me, even so as a dead body does a living being. If I am not above the law I am the most depraved of all men."

¹See references in M. Luce, *Handbook to Shakespeare*, pp. 31-45.

²Book III.

³The *Inspiration of Poetry*, p. 13, quoting the following from Emerson.

The spirit which dwells within me, whence comes it, unless it comes from you? Grant me proof that I am yours; nothing but madness will prove it to me."¹ Thus madness is to be desired, even prayed for. It suspends the reason and opens the heart; and the heart sees further than the head. "From insanity," said Plato, "Greece has derived its greatest benefits."

We have perhaps advanced no great way toward a complete understanding of the poetic madness. We have made some progress, however, if instead of calling it merely a "celestial inspiration," we connect it with other things with which we are familiar, and recognize in this matter also the common character of poetry, dreams, and the manifestations of hysteria. The evidence on this head has led us to the following conclusions which may be presented here by way of summary. Our desires demand satisfaction, and in their satisfaction we secure pleasure, relaxation, sanity of mind and body. Our desires, however, cannot be completely satisfied, nor are we destined to secure complete health and happiness. While one desire is being satisfied new ones are springing up, keeping in advance, leading to new energy, and new activity — to all that makes up our lives as far as action and accomplishment are concerned. Some of our desires, however, cannot be satisfied, because they conflict with fact or authority; thus wanting indulgence or expression they are, so to speak, forced back and dammed up. They then give rise to conditions of torpidity, tension, inflammation — that is, to emotional disturbances, according to their nature and importance of varying degrees of intensity. Of these disturbances the tension accompanying dreams, the neuroses we have mentioned, and the poetic madness are alike instances. This condition, moreover, requiring to be relieved, or purged, such relief or purgation is afforded in dreams and poetry, as we have described, through a shadow of satisfaction, which affords a pleasure akin to actual satisfaction. Hence the comfort that lies in the writing or reading of poetry, and hence one source of the pleasure we derive from poetry as from all art, it is a pleasure of satisfaction, bearing the same relation to actual pleasure which the ideal

¹The Dawn of Day, Sec. 14.

bears to the real; one is the ethereal counterpart of the other

The relief or purgation just spoken of, moreover, is accomplished in a manner contributing finally to the good of the organism or the race as follows. Poetry, with its allied mental productions, presents before our eyes a picture, not of the world as it is, but of the world as we wish it to be, or — since surely our desires are not meaningless but like all else in nature ordered and significant — may we not say, not of present reality but of coming reality. Poetry looks toward that universal or purified or perfected nature of which Aristotle speaks. The poet prefigures the world which is to come, and points the path later men are to follow — as Moses saw from Pisgah the promised land which not he but his people were to occupy. Thus, when man is not acting he is seeing; life is sublimated in poetry, and men of action give place as leaders to seers and poets. “Truly the laurel crown appointed for triumphant captains doth worthily, of all other learnings, honor the poet’s triumph.”

